FLYING HEELS

HAROLD M. SHERMAN

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JERRY WENT DOWN IN A SKIDDING SLIDE, AND IN TWO FLASHING STRIDES BUCK HAD RECOVERED THE PUCK.

FLYING HEELS

AND OTHER HOCKEY STORIES

BY

HAROLD M. SHERMAN

AUTHOR OF
FLASHING STEEL
ONE MINUTE TO PLAY
BLOCK THAT KICK
HIT BY PITCHER
BASES FULL, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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TO

CLARKE PAINTER

WHO LOVES THE DRAMATIC IN SPORTS

ICE HOCKEY

KING OF WINTER SPORTS!

"PLAY!"

From the moment the referee drops the puck to the ice to the final banging of the time-keeper's gun marking the end of the game—ice hockey reigns supreme as the greatest, most nerve-requiring, breath-taking, speed-dazzling, body-bruising, eye-chilling sport in the wide realm of Old Man Winter!

In "FLYING HEELS," Harold M. Sherman has photographed in word pictures as with a speed camera—the verve and dash of Ice Hockey! . . . No thrills have escaped his attention in his desire to pass on to his readers every sensation of the game! You *feel* the impact of a dashing offensive formation as its players bring up with smacking thuds against the rigid flesh wall of the opposing team's defensive warriors! You cringe as a player's feet are clipped out from under him and he slides

dizzily across the ice to bring up with a hollow-sounding thump against the wooden sideboards and lies sprawled and motionless—knocked cold! You cheer as this player is brought around and crawls pluckily to his feet—insisting on sticking in the game! And you follow his every move as he is swallowed up once more amid the maddest of hockey sorties and melees!

This is hockey as Harold M. Sherman, popular writer of sport books, pictures for you in "FLYING HEELS." There's never a let-up as you pass from one scene of action to another—meeting characters you instantly like and for whom you are pulling to come through!

In "FLYING HEELS," the author of "One Minute To Play" and other football books, as well as "THE HOME RUN SERIES" and "THE MAYFIELD BASKETBALL SERIES" has written a fitting sequel to his other great hockey book, "Flashing Steel."

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FLYING HEELS

FLYING HEELS

"GEE, I hope they don't postpone this game!"

It was Don Egan, star left wing of the Parker High hockey team talking, and his face wore an exceedingly glum look.

"Me, too!" sided in Jim Watson, Don's running mate, who played right wing, "Our last year in school, our last chance to play for old Parker . . . and the biggest game of the season! This ice is safe enough, don't you think?"

The question was directed to whomever might answer. But nobody cared to venture a comment. It would do no good anyway. If the officials of the Timberville and Parker high-schools, now in conference, decided that it was too dangerous to go out upon the Timber river . . . that settled it. There would be no game, and the intense rivalry between these two

schools would have to be held in leash until another year. Hang the mumps! It was this contagious swelling of jaw bones which had caused a postponement of the original date for the clash, throwing the game into the month of March . . . a month which could not be depended upon for anything except everything that nobody wanted. Why couldn't the thaw have waited just another day . . . or the high, south wind?

The little town of Parker had moved upon the little town of Timberville almost enmass, for the purpose of watching their home boys carve out a victory with their flashing hockey sticks. It would be a keen disappointment indeed should the contest be declared off. But Timberville was equally anxious to snap at Parker's throat. The crowd of enthusiasts which lined the river bank on the Timberville side, expressed its sentiment in yells.

"Come on. Let's go!"

"Who's delaying the game?"

"The ice is all right!"

At the point where the hockey clash was to take place, the Timber river was close to a half mile in width. A quarter of a mile above the town of Timberville was the site of the Timber-

ville mills. And, a good mile above this, was Timber lake, the scene of logging activities. Lumbering men had been waiting for the long-prophesied break-up on lake and river . . . and the floating down of the log rafts. But the break-up had been unusually late in coming, a fact which had allowed for the scheduling of the hockey game within two weeks of the first day of spring! How winter had laughed at spring this year! Today was the first that gave evidence of warmer weather . . . but the stiff wind from the south had aided materially. Ice-pans had begun to creak and groan on Timber lake . . . and the jam against the bridge where the lake narrowed into the river, had grown so strong as to threaten the bridge itself. In fact, had it not been for the bridge, it was doubtful if the river ice would still have been held intact.

"Well, the conference is over," informed Don, getting up to skate about the shore ice in impatient circles, "We'll soon have the news—one way or the other."

"Probably the—*other,*" said Jim, pessimistically, "I don't like the way they've kept the crowd off the ice . . . and us off the rink. Shucks! I wish it'ud have been the year for

Timberville to play at Parker. Being ten miles down the river helps out. The break-up, if one's coming, wouldn't hit us before tomorrow!"

"Lot of good it does you to wish!" sniffed Don, "Listen, now, to our fate!"

Principal Stallard of Timberville High, stepped out upon the shore-ice where he might command a view of the crowd. A volley of hisses hushed the noisy mob of rooters as the white-haired professor raised his arms.

"Good friends of Parker and Timberville . . ." he started.

"Ow!" groaned Jim, "What did I tell you? . . . It's all over!"

"You're right," admitted Don, "Anyone who'd call Parker and Timberville 'friends' today . . ."

Sure enough. The game was off . . . even though it did take five minutes of long-winded oratory to announce the fact. The principal regretted the necessity of canceling the contest, the entire faculty of four teachers regretted it, the school janitor regretted it, the students no doubt would regret it, the principal of Parker High regretted it, the entire faculty of the op-

posing school regretted it . . . blankety-blank and blankety-blank and blankety-blank regretted it . . . BUT . . . it could not be helped. The officials had held off until the last minute awaiting reports from men sent up to watch the action of Timber Lake. Due to the severe winter and the great accumulation of ice, the pressure—as the ice began to crack and crumble—was such as to jeopardize the bridge. Once released from the lake, the force behind the ice would wreak havoc with the still glimmering surface of the river. It would be foolhardy, under such conditions, to permit some hundreds of spectators and the two teams upon the rink, which was laid out almost midway between the two banks. Better restrain the intense and commendable spirit until Parker and Timberville could meet without the risk of lives. A year passed very quickly anyway. Had anyone in that vast and vibrant crowd noticed this fact? Another year and nerves would tingle again with the same enthusiastic anticipation of combat . . .

"Not *our* nerves!" lamented Don, "We're done!"

He looked down at his sweater and the large

letter "P" and then at the hockey stick which would never again be lifted in defense of old Parker.

"It's a nice little 'disappointment softener' he's dishing up," muttered Jim, "But it doesn't hit home with us. Just think—to get this near a game—and then not play it! Oh, boy, it's tough!"

Team-members patted Don and Jim on the back . . . a poor attempt to console . . . but the only way they knew. They would gladly have gone out on the ice to do battle with Timberville . . . just to have given their two star mates one last shot at Parker's most bitter foe . . . The players were unafraid of the ice going out. That was the least of their worries. And this did not mean that they failed to exercise a proper sense of caution either. But each fellow knew how to take care of himself. Each fellow had been baptized at one time or another in steaming ice water. Such experiences had tended to make them a bit more bold than their professors. Besides, hadn't Eliza, in Uncle Tom's Cabin, crossed a river by leaping from cake to cake? Pshaw! They could beat her seven ways and it wouldn't take bloodhounds to make 'em do it, either. All they wanted was

to be 'sicked' on Timberville. Then let the ice break up into cakes if it had to. And let Timberville watch out for themselves!

But all these wild thoughts of what they would do if they were only allowed, didn't get the members of the Parker High hockey team anywhere. As the crowd began to break up in groups, even before Principal Stallard had finished his discourse upon ice, its formation, thaw and deteriorization—incidentally mentioning that the game was called off—the Parker and Timberville teams started dumbly for Judge Henry's General Store where a dressing room had been arranged. Nothing remained for them but to crawl back into civilian clothes and act sociable toward each other . . . as sociable as they could under the circumstances, with both sides being able to boast a superiority which neither one could prove.

"Bang! Bang! . . . Bang! . . . Bang! Bang!"

The scattering crowd brought up on its haunches. Gun shots! From up the river in the direction of the mill. What could be the cause? It was Friday afternoon . . . a half holiday had been declared . . . most of the workers were on hand to witness the hockey game . . .

Don and Jim, on their knees, in the act of removing their skates—straightened up and looked at one another questioningly.

"Hello! Trouble of some kind!"

"Up around the bend!"

The boys listened, straining forward that they might hear the better against the strong south gale. Workers in the crowd started at once on a run for the mill. Others followed.

"Let's go!" volunteered Don

"With you!" rejoined Jim, pulling at his skates.

"No, no! Leave your skates on! We can follow the shore-ice and get there in a jiffy . . . half the time. Take your stick along!"

Team-members, on the river bank, looked back—astonished—to see the two star forwards pressing up the glaring surface of the frozen river in the face of the wind.

"Hey! Get off the ice! Come in, here!"

But the two figures, skating stride for stride, whizzed around the bend . . . and were gone.

"Got to get a thrill out of this somehow!" gasped Don, grinning, as they met the full force of the wind, rounding the arm of land.

"Seems good . . . just digging out . . .

doesn't it?" Jim smiled back, "Say—look ahead!"

Don looked . . . and the grin left his face.

It was possible now to gaze a mile up the Timber river. The mill buildings were plainly in sight on a rise of ground at the right, still some distance away. Beyond, faintly visible, was the bridge which spanned the river . . . the only bridge within ten miles . . . the bridge that the boys had crossed to come to Timberville from Parker. BUT—*Was* the bridge visible? It should have been . . . ordinarily. Now, however, it was GONE! And, in its place, the boys saw what appeared to be a mountain of ice, riding high, crumbling, growling and cracking . . . moving like a great, sluggish monster . . . sweeping everything before it . . . the river ice snapping under the oncoming pressure . . . snapping from both shores!

As chilling as this spectacle was, a drama taking place but an eighth of a mile in front of them, commanded their whole attention. The form of a heavy set man running out on the shore-ice from the mill, turning to take a calculating glance at the surging ice . . . then a nervous glance toward the town of Timber-

ville and the shore road with workers even now running along it, toward him. Seeing this the man cast an anxious glance toward the opposite shore . . . and freedom. As he looked, the figure of another man staggered out from the office building of the mill and pointed an arm.

"Bang! Bang!"

Apparently the shots missed . . . but they decided the heavy-set man on his course of action. He leaped out upon the ice and started, on a lurching run, for the opposite shore, returning the fire as a warning to possible pursuers!

"Bang!"

The figure following staggered to the river's edge and looked toward the south . . . This look was enough for him. He stopped . . . glanced north . . . sighted help coming . . . and shouted wildly . . . Then he slumped to the ground, either exhausted or wounded.

By this time Don and Jim were within hailing distance, fairly tearing over the ice, skates flashing, bodies swaying. They pulled up in a skidding slide which threw a spray of chipped ice.

"What's the matter? What's happened?"

Surprised, the man on shore lifted his head.

"I've been robbed!" he cried, frantically, "The company's money. Four thousand dollars! He's got it . . . a wallet!"

"Who are you?" demanded Jim, quickly.

"The paymaster . . . tomorrow's pay!"

The two stars on the Parker High hockey team swung about to gaze at the lone desperado who was taking his life in his hands in an attempt to get away with his theft. Almost a half a mile to the other shore . . . a race against the plowing rush of ice. Even now the boys could feel little quivers under foot as the river ice strained to hold in place . . .

"We could catch him!" hazarded Don, eyes snapping with excitement.

"But could we beat it?" asked Jim, nodding to the south.

"Leave him go, boys . . . leave him go!" begged the paymaster, alarmed, "He's a goner. I wouldn't go out on that ice for a million dollars!"

"It's worth a try," said Don, "You game?"

"You know me!" answered Jim.

Spectators on shore gasped their astonishment and horror as they learned the circumstances and saw the stars of the Parker High team in pursuit of the heavy-set man who

slipped and stumbled as he raced frenziedly, eyes only for the jamming ice-floe bearing down upon him.

The ice under the skates of the two hockey players was as smooth as the surface of the rink on which the big game was to have been played. Don imagined, as he bent to the task of over-taking the fleeing bandit, that the fellow was a husky opponent who had broken away and was dashing down the rink for a try at goal. There was the spirit of conflict in Jim, too. Plenty of competition, here! The dull roar of the approaching ice-pans; the desperate speed of the robber, and the added danger of the weapon they knew he carried! The longer it took them to catch up with him, the less their chances were of getting back to shore . . . unless they continued on to the other side . . . And then, catching up to him meant the problem of overpowering the fellow . . . and doing it quickly, else all might perish. Don and Jim realized this as they gained, stroke by stroke . . . the robber seeming not even mindful that he was being followed.

Ten yards behind and the man pursued wheeled suddenly. He had heard the click of the skates. Surprise mounted his features as a

hand went to his pocket. Instinctively Don and Jim separated, leaning against the wind as they sought to keep advancing without slackening.

Bang!

A bullet sung past Jim's ear. He half fell in the attempt to dodge and sunk to one knee, sliding along the ice. His hockey stick saved him from a bad tumble.

Slashing in from the other side, bending low, with a sweeping stride . . . and wielding his hockey stick murderously, Don made straight for the desperado who turned to meet the attack, gun leveled. He pulled the trigger, point-blank.

But there was no report.

The weapon was empty!

As Don neared the man he saw a dark black object clutched tightly in the fellow's left hand. With no time to reload, the bandit hurled the gun at the flying figure on skates who was so rapidly assailing him. Don warded the metal weapon off by putting up his hands. He heard the gun strike his stick a glancing blow, drop to the ice and go clattering along.

Evidently feeling that his hope lay in continued flight, the robber turned his back and did his best to outstrip the youths on skates. Five . . . ten . . . fifteen feet he ran. Don

could hear the excited yells of those back on shore . . . yells now indistinct. He had not had time to heed the onrush of the ice-floe . . . and he wondered if the cries were so much because of his nearness to the bandit as they were to warn of the nearness of this other peril. Jim had recovered now and was swerving in from the other side.

Don's hockey stick swished through the air and clipped the feet of the bandit out from under him in one, clean slash. The fellow went sprawling on all fours, sliding along the ice . . . stunned. Ahead of him . . . as though it were a puck . . . slid a dark black object . . . much bigger than a puck, of course . . . the wallet! Don was after the wallet in an instant. He recovered it, babied the wallet at the end of his stick, and sent it whizzing across the ice to Jim who had pulled up beside the prostrate figure of the man. Jim, in the heat of the moment, stabbed out his stick and stopped the strange substitution for a puck . . . a grin spreading over his face. He gave the bulging wallet a smashing drive with his stick and it went skidding back in the direction it had come.

"Take it in!" screamed Don, with an eye now to the other danger.

The star forwards of the Parker High hockey team could feel the surging of the water as it pounded underneath their feet. Crackling murmurs came to their ears. To the south, alarmingly close, a crushing wall of ice was riding . . . and piling. They were about an equal distance from either shore.

"What you going to do?" called Jim, "We've got to hurry!"

"Never mind me!" ordered Don, "I'm coming . . . the old follow-up play!"

Eyes widened with terror, the bandit scrambled to his feet, lurching on. He was confronted with a youth in the hockey suit and colors of Parker High who brandished a wicked looking stick overhead.

"The other way! You're going back!"

"No, no!"

"Back I say! See that ice . . . there's no time . . ."

The bandit faced about, gladly. It was almost humorous to see him redoubling his efforts to return to the shore he had so recently left in great haste. But it wasn't humorous either. The ice peril was now very imminent and very real. Jagged cracks were running through the ice under foot. Jim, a few strokes ahead, had

held back to be of aid to Don should he need it. On reaching the wallet again he had smacked it such a mighty stroke that the dark black object had carried clear to shore-ice. And an exceedingly portly individual—Mr. Henderson by name—retrieved the piece of leather wadded with bills, sighing his satisfaction. Facts of the matter were, however, he was much more concerned about the welfare of those who had recovered it . . .

Twice the bandit fell . . . and twice Don and Jim grabbed him up and helped him on . . . shoving and exhorting him to hurry. The fellow's tongue hung out from his exertions but he plunged on . . . for it was life or death to him. At the last the ice was parting from the shore and a section of it sunk drunkenly beneath the water. It was here that the two hockey stars, each gripping an arm of the bandit's, fairly lifted him over the perilous place, jumping a two foot water gap as the huge mass of ice thundered past with a roar.

Once in safe hands, surrounded by members of both teams and the frenzied hundreds who had witnessed the pulsating chase, the thwarting of the robber and the thrilling return journey . . . Don and Jim collapsed from fatigue.

They were immensely happy, though. Somehow, the fact that the game with Timberville had been canceled, no longer seemed to matter. They had had a game all of their own . . . a fitting climax to their last season with old Parker High.

"You know, Don, that wallet shot of yours was the best I ever saw you make!" complimented Jim.

"And the way you drove that pocketbook toward the home goal was a knockout!" complimented Don.

"Well—I don't particularly commend you boys for the chance you took on behalf of the Timberville Mills," said the fat Mr. Henderson, "But, inasmuch as you did it, flashing a splendid offense and an equally effective defense . . . all I can say is—you've won five hundred dollars toward a college education!"

Don and Jim looked at one another—astounded . . . and, quite naturally, pleased.

Then the ice pans had their say with a creaking groan and Timberville folks came in with a hearty cheer, admitting, in true sportsmanship fashion, that Parker's superiority for the year had been proven even without a game.

WHISKERS

WHAT you talking about? If you never saw Whiskers Landen play hockey, you never saw a wild bull on ice skates!

Say, to see him charge down the ice, bumping the enemy right and left and usually getting bumped himself, was a bushel basket of thrills! Whiskers was the kind of defense man you couldn't do without and you could hardly do *with!* If you know what I mean? . . . He didn't have any more idea of team play than a dog has meows but boy, oh boy—the way he could stop drives into our territory! Many times I've seen Whiskers brace himself, grinning from ear to ear, and body-check two and three opponents at once . . . all of 'em going down in a skidding heap and Whiskers crawling out of the tangle to go dashing away with the puck! On defense he was the rock of Gibraltar and Custer's last stand but on the offense he was a piece of cheese! And should *I* know?

Jeff Peters and me were left and right wings last year which, with Big Baldy, centre, is supposed to be Colby High's attacking trio! But do you think, when Whiskers gets the puck, that he'd pass to us? Not on your bread and butter! Whiskers sets sail for the enemy's goal single-handed and doesn't stop going till he gets a shot at the cage or is knocked out of play! He has the spectators ragging him one minute and cheering him the next! Every time he crashes through for a shot, bowling over whoever happens to be in his way, he's a hero. Every time the opposition stops him and takes the puck away from him when he might have passed to one of us for a chance to score, he's a dub!

Coach Frederick tries his darndest to break Whiskers of his individual stuff but he might as well have tried to put up a wind-break for a cyclone!

"Go sit on a tack, coach!" Whiskers says, with a grin, "When I get up steam I can't be bothered with passing to anybody! Let the boys follow me up, if they want to, in case I get spilled . . . or have 'em come in from the sides near the goal to bat in rebounds! But don't you do nothing to interfere with my style!"

Funny, isn't it, how sometimes you'll put up with a fellow who's the exception to about ninety-nine out of a hundred rules! But Coach Frederick lets Whiskers have his way after satisfying himself that putting a curb on Whiskers' individual dashes was seriously slowing up his game.

"You can't make a freight train out of an express!" the coach says to us, "And I wouldn't want to if I could! But boys, I'm here to tell you, we've all got a big responsibility on our hands! I think this year's team is good enough to have a chance at the Little Valley Championship. Competition's going to be mighty stiff, though! And, if we come through it's going to be because we've used our material to best advantage. Now, I know that some of you fellows are a little soured on Whiskers for the way he hogs the puck. But don't forget that Whiskers has his redeeming qualities. He's a fighting fool who doesn't know the meaning of the word 'fear'—the greatest defensive player I've ever seen on a highschool six! And since he's the very backbone of our defense, it's up to us to make allowances . . .!"

"But, coach!" protests Jeff Peters, "That's all well and good if it wasn't for the colossal conceit that Whiskers has got! He knows he's

half a team in himself and he doesn't mind telling the world about it!"

Coach Frederick laughs. "Sure, but he's harmless! Let him think what he pleases! What do you care? Kid him along! Whiskers means well enough!"

And the coach is right about that. There's something infectious about Whiskers even though he does get his nickname from bragging about himself. And yet you could hardly call it bragging either. Being wise to Walter Landen, you can't help feeling—as cuckoo over the game as he is—that he's just got to rave when he makes a corking play!

I'd like to have a soda for all the times I've heard him pull his pet phrase, "Guess there wasn't any whiskers on that!" It's gotten now so the boys yell "Whiskers!" at him before he gets the chance!

As the season rolls along we follow the coach's advice, letting Whiskers have his way and trying to pick up the loose ends of his drives down the rink with the puck every time he meets disaster. And it even gets to be funny when we run into some tight games, to hear Whiskers saying: "That's all right, guys! Leave things to me! We'll pull out of this! Watch me crash their defense!"

And pretty soon, biff! bang! smash! and Whiskers has made good! He hardly ever scores and loses the puck about three-quarters of the time which sometimes we recover for shots and sometimes we don't . . . but he does make things plenty hot for the opposition while he lasts!

Big-chested, stockily built Whiskers! You can bet he's a blood-chilling sight to rival defense men when he's coming down the ice at them full speed! Whiskers is not intentionally rough. He just plays the game for all there is in it and if they're some bumps—all right, he'll take his share, coming up smiling every time for more! But do you wonder that some of his opponents prefer to side-step rather than meet our wild bull head-on?

The night after the Pellton game which we've won, 5 to 3, in which Whiskers has had more luck than usual, slamming in two of our counters after spectacular dashes the length of the rink, he goes to the pains of telling us in the locker room just what it is that makes him so good! And of course we, true to form, string him along.

"The trouble with you guys is," expostulates Whiskers, "You can't take the puck up the ice without keeping your eyes on the stick. Now

that's where I come pretty close to being a second Hobey Baker!"

"Who's he?" asks Jeff Peters, winking at me.

"The greatest hockey player America ever produced!" answers Whiskers.

"Gee, you don't hate yourself, do you?" razzes Big Baldy.

"Oh, you go sit on a tack!" grins Whiskers, unaffected, "Now this fellow Baker, when he was in a game, never had to look at his stick after he got the puck, to see if it was there! He could tell by the feel!"

"That's remarkable all right," I admits.

"It's simple when you get the hang of it," takes up Whiskers, "But there's few that can do it! . . . You birds watch me next game! You'll notice that once I get the puck, I ride it right along with my eyes ahead, looking out for what I'm about to run into . . . and that's how I get around or smash through as many times as I do! But where you have to keep one eye on the puck most of the time to be sure you've still got it, you can't go at top speed . . . and the minute you get in a mix-up, you're pretty close to lost!"

Of course there's a lot of truth in what Whiskers is saying and we're not disputing that

he's probably the best puck handler on the team. But we're all of us good-naturedly wishing that Whiskers didn't have it on us all the time. It's not often a fellow can be so good that he wipes out his sins as he goes along, and that's just what Whiskers is doing! Sport writers all say he'd be a world wonder if he could cut the grandstand stuff and play teamwork but they admit, as it is, he's about the sweetest hockey player ever seen in these parts.

"With his one fault we love him still," says the Morning News in a sports editorial, referring to Whiskers' individual style but handing him the major share of credit for our season's showing! "And perhaps," the editorial goes on to add, "If Whiskers was any different, he wouldn't be Whiskers which would be something else again!" Proving that other folks besides the coach have a hunch on leaving well enough alone!

We're down to the two last games on our schedule in the Little Valley Highschool Conference and we're still undefeated and the town has gotten all excited about the possibility of our winning the championship for the first time. Only Franklin and Morris High schools stand between us and the cup! But they're the tough-

est teams in the conference and they've walloped the nine others about as hard as we have!

And now, when the papers begin to talk up these two battles, what do you suppose they say? "If it weren't for the presence of Whiskers Landen, star left defense, in Colby's line-up . . . the three sixes would be rated an equal chance to win. But Landen alone should carry the margin of victory if he plays up to the great form shown in previous games!"

"What do you say we start Whiskers against Franklin and Morris by himself!" suggests Jeff Peters, dryly, when he reads this.

"Oh, well!" says I, "We mustn't forget our senses of humor! Remember coach's orders! You can't expect to be playing with a genius and be anything but background!"

"Just the same!" argues Jeff, "It's darn hard being in there and seeing all the chances we miss to score just because Big "I" won't pass to little "us"!"

"That's true!" I admits, "But that's the wrong way to figure it! We may miss a big percentage of chances to score but we usually manage to whang the puck in on a rebound or pick it out of a mix-up, due to Whiskers' taking it down into enemy territory! So he's indirectly good

for a goal or two a game at least . . . and here's one big thing the coach sees in him that we're passing over—the coach knows that as long as the puck's down around our opponents' goal there's no danger of our being scored on . . . and there's always a chance of our scoring . . . which is another way of saying that lots of times the best defense is a corking offense!"

"Oh, I get all that!" answers Jeff, scornfully, "But I wonder if you've noticed this? . . . It's been getting harder and harder lately for Whiskers to do his stuff! He's a marked man before he takes the ice! This newspaper publicity has got all the teams up in arms against him! They know they've got to stop Whiskers or he'll stop them! And somehow, I've a sneaking hunch that a day of reckoning is coming!"

"Jeff," says I, looking at him sharp, "You've been howling about Whiskers off and on ever since the season's started. Come clean! Aren't you just a teeny weeny bit jealous?"

Jeff's face goes red but he comes back strong.

"That's the thanks I get!" he says, "For reading the handwriting on the wall! Another thing—we've gotten so used to depending on

Whiskers to pull us through that if he ever really got bottled up . . . would we go to pieces? Answer me that!"

Now here's a thought that's worth cogitating! I confess myself it's a pretty healthy feeling knowing that Whiskers Landen's on deck, dashing up and down the rink and making the spectators' blood run hot and cold. You can't help handing it to a fellow, no matter how much of a puck hog he is, who throws himself in the game like Whiskers does! And there's no question but what Whiskers has been a mighty demoralizing influence to more than one opponent! So, realizing this, it's problematical as to what we'd do if, one of these times, Whiskers would be stopped dead!

"Aw, let's not worry about milk that isn't spilled!" I says, finally, "We haven't hit a team yet that could hold Whiskers for long and the chances are we won't!"

"There you go!" raves Jeff Peters, "That just shows how hypnotized we are! What made Rome fall? Why did Napoleon meet his Waterloo? Are you guys going to let history repeat itself and us lose the best chance we ever had to cop the championship by not being prepared to meet the . . . the inevitable?"

Big Baldy, who's come in on the discussion,

looks at me and winks. Then he lays a hand soothingly on Jeff's shoulder.

"Calm down, old man! Calm down!" he says, "Ken here is right! Don't trouble trouble until trouble troubles you! Shave Whiskers off your brain. All we got to worry about is ourselves! If we played half as hard as he does, no team in the world could beat us!"

Well, the Franklin game comes and we're all on edge for it. But at the end of the first period, we're trailing, 1 to 0. Just seems that we can't get going!

"That's all right, gang!" Whiskers tells us in the locker room, "We've got the measure of these babies! They're goners from here on in!"

It's the same old line and we don't pay much attention to it except that we're a little more anxious than usual on account of Franklin being plenty hot and us having to win if we want to keep our claim to the championship.

"Looks like you'll have to break through for us," I throws at Whiskers for bait.

Whiskers grins. This thing of coming up from behind with a rush is his meat. He likes to feel his own power and doesn't mind being told that he's saved the day.

"Sure!" says our man of destiny, "Why this

bunch isn't so much. We could spot 'em another goal and beat 'em out in the last period!"

"Well, let's not try any cat and mouse stunt!" warns Jeff, uneasily, "This is no game to paw around with!"

"I'll get a goal in the first five minutes of this next period!" guarantees Whiskers with a glint in his eye.

"Poor Franklin!" I says under my breath, having a vision of the rink strewn with human wreckage.

"Whiskers!" pleads Jeff, "I know you're immortal and all that and I don't suppose it does any good to bring this up . . . but if you could just see your way clear to passing to us once and awhile when we're in position . . . we . . .!"

But the gong calls us back to the rink for the second period. And right away it's evident that Franklin's decided to hold that one point lead like the French held Paris! With four minutes of the period gone we haven't so much as made a dent in Franklin's defense and the mighty Whiskers has been bumped three times at mid-ice, the last time so hard that it sounds like every vertebra cracks.

"How about my hunch?" asks Jeff, skating

over to me, "They're beginning to stop our big boy, aren't they?"

I haven't time to answer. The play is fast and furious. And I can tell, glancing at Whiskers, that he's about ready to burst—he's so peeved at being blocked. Then again, Whiskers is not the kind to say he'll make a goal in a certain length of time and not die trying! And his five minutes right now is thirty seconds from being up!

Franklin makes a sally at our cage and Whiskers recovers the rubber disc. Nursing it along at the end of his stick, he starts back around our goal, picking up speed as he goes, a determined look on his face. It's his intention to come roaring out on the other side of the net and go shooting off down the ice, heaven helping whoever would have nerve enough or be so foolish as to get in his way!

"Come on, Whiskers!" cries the crowd, all primed for one of his dashes.

But as Whiskers goes whizzing past the left post of our cage . . . something that he or nobody else notices at the moment, happens! The puck rolls off his stick! Whiskers veers and dips low, sending up a shower of ice as he swoops around behind the net and comes out,

eyes well down the rink, sizing up the defense that's forming to meet him. He never once glances at his stick and he's at mid-ice, tearing full speed, before we and Franklin see that he doesn't have the puck. The Franklin centre, after trying a poke-check at Whiskers as he whizzes by, lets our wild bull go. So do the Franklin defense men and Whiskers, thinking this lack of resistence is due to fear of his terrific drive, bears down savagely on the Franklin goal. It's only when he prepares to swing that his face takes on a horrified expression and he brings up short, staring madly around. Everybody else is on a wild hunt by this time, thinking the puck has probably slipped unseen against the sideboards. But no!

"There it is!" cries a Franklin rooter, suddenly, pointing to our cage. "In the net! Whoopee! a goal for us!"

And sure enough—there's the little black disc which somehow has gotten away from the fellow who never has to look at his stick to tell when it is there . . . and just for spite it's rolled into our goal, evading Darnell, our goalie, who's been busy watching the infallible Whiskers at the time!

Score: Franklin, 2; Colby, 0!

Are we in a hole? Well, I guess! And maybe this break don't unnerve us! In the first place it takes considerable of the glamour off a certain Whiskers Landen! We've been led to suspicion that he's a little bit more than human but he's fallen from grace now and he doesn't look any better to us than a clumsy ox. And the crowd—you should hear the razz they're giving him!

"Might be a good idea to keep your eye on the puck somewhat after this!" says Jeff, by way of gently rubbing it in.

But Whiskers only laughs.

"Go sit on a tack!" he retorts, "I produced, didn't I?"

"What do you mean?"

"I scored a goal in the time I said I would!"

But we don't see any humor in this! We've been holding our patience against Whiskers too long as it is and now that he's put on the crown of sap . . .!

"Besides!" adds Whiskers, k i d d i n g l y, "Didn't I say we could spot 'em two goals and beat 'em? . . . How do you know I didn't make that goal on purpose?"

Say, as we line up for the next face-off, we're so mad we can bite nails in two! I take a pass

from Big Baldy and slip the puck to Jeff who dribbles along the sideboards, then shoots it out to me after I've just managed to get around the Franklin right defense, who's been dogging me the whole game. It's the first free shot we've had at the Franklin cage and I make it good with a drive that catches the goalie flat-footed . . . and we've at least got back the goal that Whiskers has handed to Franklin on a silver platter!

"It won't be long now!" Whiskers yells out and two minutes later he's really got the puck and headed for the Franklin cage under full steam. The Franklin defense men try to body-check him but he goes right through, tossing one on either side and bears down on the Franklin goalie who puts up his stick like he's praying to Allah for he instinctively knows that Whiskers has him at his mercy.

And all in a couple minutes' time we've evened the count!

And the king has redeemed himself! Whiskers Landen is again on his throne! "Guess there wasn't any Whiskers on that!"

The game's a rout after that in comparison. We don't score any more in the second period but Big Baldy and I get a goal apiece in the

third, both from rebounds of drives by Whiskers who's the wildest I've ever seen him.

The game ends with us leading, 4 to 2, and I can't resist taking a crack at Jeff.

"Some hunch you had!" I joshes, "Got any more in your system?"

Jeff shakes his head.

"That Whiskers is a miracle!" he admits, "But I'm telling you—he's absolutely too good to last!"

"Oh, I don't know!" says I, "Look at Red Grange and Charlie Paddock and Big Bill Tilden! They lasted, didn't they? I'll agree Whiskers didn't seem so hot when he plunked a goal for Franklin . . . but what can I say now? . . . Even Babe Ruth's a boob when he strikes out! No, Jeff, the more I see this guy Whiskers in action, the more I have to take my hat off to him! He's THERE!"

Which eulogy brings only a shrug of the shoulders in reply. Jeff is the team pessimist anyway. And perhaps it's a good thing that one of us is always seeing the dark side of the clouds so's the rest of us don't get too flighty. But here we are—right down to the last game of the season—and only Morris High left to dispute our claim to the championship!

Morris comes to Colby loaded for bear. They've had scouts attending our last three games and they've worked out a special defense that's calculated to stop the mighty Whiskers Landen dead in his tracks! Franklin players, who've favored Morris over us, have told the scouts plenty, too! Among other things they've claimed to have held our wild bull powerless the first period when we failed to score . . . held him while they were crashing through for the only score they made, not counting the one that Whiskers so obligingly made for 'em. And it's their contention if Morris uses the system they started out to use against our hockey phenom, reinforced by a sort of follow-up defense . . . that the much feared siege gun won't be able to blast his way down the rink. Morris listens to all this advice, since it doesn't cost anything . . . and puts it with their own deductions and out of it all evolves the scheme that's going to lay Whiskers low!

Of course there's a lot of talk going the rounds and we team members can't help but wonder what impression, if any, it's making on the guy who's terrorized every Six we've met. Apparently Whiskers is absolutely unmoved by threats or plans or attempts directed at subdu-

ing him. And we've noticed that the teams that have come the closest to stopping him have paid the dearest for it in the end. Which seems to indicate that Whiskers thrives on the opposition that's thrown against him! He has that athletic something within him that rises to every occasion . . . the hotter the fight . . . the higher the rising!

All right! The game for the championship is on! There's a thousand rooters from Morris in the stands putting up a terrific noise as we go into action from the face-off! The Morris centre, Kilpatrick's his name, beats Big Baldy to the puck and snaps it to his left wing. The left wing shoots in and tries a pass to his partner but Whiskers smears the play and everybody comes up on their feet to see what the Colby wild bull's going to do on his first dash down the ice!

Oh, ho! You should see what Morris has got in store for Whiskers! As he starts by mid-ice, Kilpatrick's the first to challenge him. He takes a poke at Whiskers' stick but fails to dislodge the puck and Whiskers skids to the right on a zig-zag course, as the crowd roars. But the two Colby backs are making for him now, not waiting for him to come to them . . . and

they force him over . . . over . . . until zam! and he crashes into the sideboards with one of the backs sliding into him. The other defense player recovers the puck and skates back around his own goal with it. Whiskers' first rush has been a total loss!

"Booh!" laughs the Morris rooters as our wild bull hurries back into position.

But Whiskers gets the laugh on them in the next minute when he blocks a Morris attack that looks promising and our right defense gets his stick on the disc, shooting it across to Jeff who passes to me . . . but we can't get through the Morris defensive line either!

"She's going to be a close-guarding, low-scoring game!" predicts a wisehead. "See that? Neither team's taking chances! Both are covering up! Wow! Three men on Whiskers' neck every time he's anywhere near the puck! He'll have to go some to show much today!"

And the last is no lie! It begins to look, in the middle of the second period, that Jeff's pessimistic prognostication is about to come true. I've never seen Whiskers so completely handcuffed! We're all tied up for that matter . . . and not being able to get an open shot at the

Morris goal, we're fighting like blazes to hold Morris away from ours!

Between the second and third periods, with the score still nothing to nothing, Jeff sidles over to me.

"Herb!" he says, "This is the game that Whiskers is going to lose for us!"

"Meaning how?" I asks, "Don't worry! He's not going to spot these boys a goal!"

"No, but he's kept us from making several already!" replies Jeff.

"And how do you figure that?"

"Are you blind? . . . Don't you see how they're driving him to the sideboards . . . boxing him out of play and taking the puck away from him? . . . What does that do? It forces us all on the defensive. And that's just the time when you and I ought to be threatening 'em . . . Herb, if psychology's worth anything the stage is all set for us to give Morris a knockout blow! But dealing the blow depends upon Whiskers!"

"Then why are you talking to me?"

"Because . . . well, I just want to show you how useless it is!" says Jeff, hopelessly, "We've had this thing out before! It all comes right down to Whiskers' passing that puck to

us instead of trying to bull it through! Morris is outsmarting and outriding him! We haven't even had a chance at a rebound from a drive of his this game! But one thing Whiskers *is* doing! He's pulling the whole Morris team out of position in order to stop him! They've got his style figured out and they're POSITIVE he won't pass! Whiskers hasn't passed in all season! Now I ask you, Herb, am I dumb when I say that now's the time to outguess . . . now's the time to have the coach or somebody have Whiskers' draw the Morris defense to the sideboards . . . then pass out to us . . . and if we can't put the puck in the net before that defense gets back into play, we ought to all be benched! !"

I look at Jeff in amazement.

"Brother!" says I, "You've got a *head!*"

And I drags Jeff over to Coach Frederick where I has him repeat his idea! You know I haven't been so strong for Jeff's sputterings until now . . . because I've doped him out as wanting some of the glory that's been going to Whiskers. But here's a piece of strategy he's thought out which, if I'm any judge, would do credit to a master minder!

"Great stuff!" compliments the coach, which further verifies my opinion. Then he looks about the locker room for our wild bull who's being tamed today for the first time.

"Whiskers!"

"Front and center!" I calls to him.

The other players crowd around. It's been a terrific battle so far and we're all showing the wear and tear. There's only a couple minutes more before the gong's to ring for the third and last period. Coach Frederick talks fast. When he gets through he ends up with: "Now, Whiskers, is everything clear?"

"But, coach!" protests Whiskers, a hurt note in his voice, "I'm going to break loose! Morris can't hold me any longer! No team's been able to stop me yet! Don't make me pass now! Let me play the old way! Let me rip 'em up! I'll show you! Just watch me!"

But for once Coach Frederick puts his foot down. Old man Cold Logic's coming in for his inning and sentiment is going by the boards! Colby's faced with the winning or losing of a hockey championship and this is for the good of the team! It's no reflection on Whiskers. Everybody knows he's been in there for all he's

worth! He's been given his way all season! Now it's his time to turn to and try, at least, to do what the coach has ordered.

"Don't forget, we're on the team, too!" says Jeff, "And we're all out there to help cop this game! Give us a look-in, Whiskers! . . . One little piece of deception . . . their defense out of position and us in the open for a clear shot . . . and it's goodbye to Morris!"

"Don't worry!" rages Whiskers, as the gong rings, "You'll have plenty of shots in the open! *Plenty!*"

But he doesn't promise to do what he's told! And he *doesn't!*

Say! . . . *SAY,* what a period this starts out to be! Morris cuts loose with a furious offensive which has us all crazy trying to stop. And for the first five minutes our goalie makes one marvelous save after another. This Morris High bunch are hot and determined! Whiskers is dumped out of the way a number of times as the Morris forward line goes shooting through. But Whiskers is up, quick as a flash, and into the thick of things after ever fall. He has to be. We need him! And when the referee sends him to the timer's box for two minutes for

roughing it . . . I think we'll never be able to weather the storm till he gets back.

"Aw, umps!" pleads Whiskers, "I didn't foul! Honest! . . . May be I hit that bird a little hard . . . but I didn't mean it!"

They're tears running down his face as he stumbles to the timer's box, the crowd giving him a great hand. But the tears aren't so much for his being sent out as they are because Whiskers is desperate! He sees now that he's not getting away! Morris is holding him! Morris is doing more than that! Morris is gaining confidence! Morris is beginning to carry the fight to him! Morris is brushing him out of the way . . . tearing on through . . . battering our goalie . . . Morris is crushing the great Landen! The king is again off his throne! He hasn't made a dash the length of the rink this game! Something is wrong! The trouble must be with him! It couldn't be the opposition! All opposition was the same! When he really had to go through, he'd gone through! And he'd go through yet! . . . He'd show them! He'd take that puck past every Morris man and jam it between their goalie's legs!

Whiskers grabs the timer's arm.

"How much more am I out?" he begs.

The timer holds up a hand and motions it four times.

"Twenty seconds!"

Whiskers groans. At the end of that time he's back on the rink like a streak and sails into a mix-up in front of our net, blocking a shot that looks like it's ticketed for a certain goal! Boy, how good it seems to know that Whiskers is in again . . . good old Whiskers . . . sins of omission and all!

And how the battle rages, though mostly in our sector! It begins to look like an overtime nothing to nothing game! The spectators are limp from cheering and we're limp from exhaustion! It's the hottest game I've ever played in and yet the kind of game that's most likely to be decided by a break.

With two minutes to go, Jeff skates past me and up to Whiskers. He says something in Whiskers' ear which I can tell Whiskers doesn't like.

"Go sit on a tack!" I can hear Whiskers snap and this time he means it.

There's a face-off over near the sideboards in our territory and the puck is hit out, Whiskers catching it on his stick. Talk about your

wild bulls! He looks wild enough now to be a herd of charging buffaloes!

"There he goes!" cries the crowd, up on their feet.

Whiskers has started for the Morris goal again but this time . . . about six feet on his right . . . Jeff Peters is traveling . . . stride for stride. They get to mid-ice and the Morris defense players loom up.

"To me! To me!" Screams Jeff, spanking his stick on the ice.

But Whiskers is looking straight ahead, the puck riding along at the end of his stick. It's obvious that he's no more going to pass than the man in the moon is going to blow his nose.

So what does Jeff do? . . . I'm trailing him where I'm in position to see! Jeff, suddenly swerves over, cutting close behind Whiskers as Whiskers turns in from the sideboards to rush between the defense men who're braced for the impact. And just at this moment, Jeff slips to one knee, leans out to the side, rakes out his stick, with a quick, hooking motion . . . and STEALS the puck! It's all done so quickly and Whiskers is so immediately swallowed up by a crash with the Morris defense . . . that hardly anyone notices the steal but me.

The instant he's got the puck, Jeff swings out to avoid the defense which Whiskers splits wide open . . . and, for the first time in the game —Whiskers gets through!

"Shoot, Whiskers!" cries our rooters, thinking Whiskers has the puck.

And Whiskers, grinning fiendishly, bears down on the goalie, not once looking down at his stick!

The Morris goalie, realizing that time is almost up and having feared Whiskers' breaking through all the game . . . stares at the wild bull speeding at him . . . and blinks his eyes as he fails to find the puck!

At the same moment, rushing in on the other side of the cage is Jeff Peters. There's a little, round, black something at the end of his stick and the goalie doesn't see it. He doesn't even see Jeff. He has eyes only for our big threat, the terrible Whiskers!

Two hockey sticks swing forward, Whiskers —almost on top of the goal—shooting without once looking down at his stick! . . . And, as his eyes center on the cage a little black object pops into the net behind the goalie.

"YEA!" shrieks our rooters, going absolutely mad.

And Jeff Peters, slipping off his feet after having shot from so close-up that he couldn't miss, smashes into the sideboards at the side and beyond the cage.

Then "BANG!" goes the timer's gun and "WHISKERS!" yells the crowd!

A few seconds later all Colby's sliding and falling over the rink, trying to get at our hero of the hour! Whiskers has only broken through once but that once has brought us victory! Oh, and what a goal he's made!

"Whiskers be blowed!" Jeff shouts in my ear as I help pick him up, "*I* made that goal!"

"Well, let's see what the scorekeeper says about it!" I suggests, feeling dazed myself.

But there's evidently been some kind of an optical illusion because the scorekeeper has credited Whiskers with the goal and he can't see it any other way. Facts of the case are, everybody's eyes have probably followed Whiskers and it's like a magician's trick . . . they've seen what they didn't see!

"Gee, gosh!" moans Jeff, "The greatest play I ever made in my life and now . . .!"

He looks over at the crowd carrying Whiskers around on their shoulders.

"Well, what do you really care?" I says,

beginning to see the funny side of it, "We won the championship, didn't we? And, honest now, would you have the heart to spoil Whiskers' hour of greatest triumph? Besides, you should remember coach's orders—Whiskers is a guy that's got to be humored!"

Jeff stares at me a second as if he's going to blow up, but he gets a hold on himself and . . . grins!

"Oh, you go sit on a tack!" he mimicks. Then his face sobers and he adds earnestly as he gives a wistful glance at the guy who's being idolized, "But just the same, Herb, between you and me—there absolutely *wasn't* any Whiskers on *that!*"

And I nods, showing him that there's at least one who understands!

THE BRAVE COWARD

"AND I say, he doesn't play!"

Jerry Stafford was captain of the Traverse City All-Stars, a team of highschool hockey players, and his final word was law. The discussion concerned one Willard Mason who had played, off and on, at right defense throughout the season. But this was the occasion of the big game with the West Side Tigers, the All-Stars' most bitter opponents, and Jerry was most insistent on placing what he considered their strongest line-up on the rink.

"No, of course I don't have anything personal against him!" retorted Jerry in quelling the protest of a fellow player, "I can't help it if he's yellow, can I? That's enough to bar him right there no matter if he does play one of the best sticks of anyone around here. The Tigers have him spotted, too—don't think they haven't. They're a tough, hard-fighting bunch and

they're just hoping we start him. But we're going to start Carl Bond instead. Bondy's got nerve; he's a fighter, even if he isn't so flashy . . . and that's what we want, plenty of nerve and fight to beat these birds!"

Upon the outcome of the clash between the All-Stars and the West Side Tigers, hung the hockey championship of Traverse City, Michigan. Every year the two rival factions contested for supremacy on the ice, but this year the game was being held much later than usual due to the lateness of Grand Traverse Bay in freezing over. Here it was—the month of March—and the bay still locked from shore to shore with a two foot thickness of ice! Six weeks of biting cold weather had done it but, just the day before yesterday, snow turning to rain had given evidence of an approaching thaw. Imperative then that the important contest, already several times postponed, be played at once.

Today, as the teams lined up for the opening whistle, the chilling wind had shifted from north to south—abruptly—and was gathering slowly into gale velocity. Spectators, crowding the borders of the rink, turned up coat collars and pulled down hats, shivering and muttering . . .

but determined to see this promising battle through.

On the sidelines, as play started, a slenderly built youth sat, lips quivering, but not from the cold. He was almost buried underneath the sweaters of his All-Star team-mates, which had been good-naturedly flung at him with the calling of time. To be branded as yellow was a serious accusation and yet Willard Mason could not find it in his heart to blame his team captain. Willard knew that his past performance, on occasion, had made it look suspiciously as though he had 'lain down' or shown the 'yellow streak.' And he, himself, could not exactly explain the reason for his actions. Why was it that, when not particularly hard pressed, he put up a brilliant game . . . but that, as soon as he was guarded closely, he apparently 'cracked wide open' . . . went to pieces? It had been that way in everything—not alone hockey. Willard reflected now that, had he not been so naturally expert at sports, it was quite probable he should never have been given a chance at all. But it surely would have been much better for him had he never have played than to have earned such a stigma for himself. Folks who

had followed his play pointed disdainfully to the time, when Willard was but a lad of eight . . . the time that he had fallen off a dock and almost drowned. What had been the result? For some years afterward no one could get him near the water . . . and then, when he had finally been induced to go in, he had displayed a ridiculous fear. "Took him all one summer to so much as duck his head!" a townsperson had said. Even now, Willard could just swim well enough to keep afloat. Water sports was one branch in which he certainly did not excel. Nor did he care to. In thinking things over, Willard wondered glumly if he actually did possess a broad stripe of the color which had long been recognized as contemptible. Somehow, up to now, he had consoled himself, through various disappointing failures after flashes of promise, that the trouble had been due to nervousness. Willard had always been frail physically, greatly underweight for his height, though extremely fast of movement. His build may have been largely responsible for his instinctive dread of hard, physical contact. Was or was not this dread an indication of cowardice? Willard hung his head at the thought of what the crowd must be thinking . . . his

absence from the line-up in THE contest of the year!

The West Side Tigers were hungry to lick their chops on the meat of victory. They received plenty of moral encouragement from their noisy supporters along the sidelines, too. Especially after the first furious five minutes of battle had rushed the Tigers into a 1 to 0 lead through a dazzling shot for goal made by their left wing. The Tigers took on a bristling, slashing confidence then, turning back the offensive onslaughts of the All-Stars by the most spirited of defense work.

At the end of the first period with the score remaining the same, Jerry Stafford gathered his team-members about him.

"Looks like the Tigers are pretty well satisfied with their one goal advantage," he said, "And they figure to stay ahead by keeping us from scoring. They've got a wonderful defense . . . but we've got to break through it, gang! We've got to! You defense men . . . come up behind our forward line. Bondy, don't let that Tiger wing draw you in again. He slipped past you for their only score."

The player substituting for Willard kicked the toe of his skate into the ice, crestfallen. Per-

haps he had possessed nerve, but this one time—at least—a little more than nerve had been required . . . the exercise of quick wit . . . and the opposing player had outsmarted him. Bond knew enough to know that this was one place where Mason would never have been tricked. And he was fair enough to say it.

"I know . . . I made an awful bonehead . . . perhaps you'd better let Willard . . ."

But the team captain cut him short.

"No—you're all right. Only watch yourself. Don't make that slip again!"

Jerry Stafford had picked his man and he was going to stick to him. Willard, holding his breath with hope, turned away . . . sick at heart. He had felt a new spirit rising up within him . . . a resentment against himself for his conduct of the past . . . a growing and burning desire for a chance to redeem himself in the eyes of his fellows . . . to overcome this dread of physical contact by entering the contest with a wild abandon . . . but now . . .?

The All-Stars went back into the fray with a grim determination to even up the count and fight their way into the lead. The weather,

however, seemed to join sides with the Tigers for the All-Stars, in changing ends—found themselves rushing straight into the teeth of the whistling south wind . . . a wind now of whipping fury. Such a day for a championship hockey contest! More a day for ice boats and sailing. Crafty Tigers! They had dropped back upon the defensive after scoring their fortunate goal, realizing how the wind would steal their energy . . . stalling the period through and clinging to their lead until they should change ends when they would have the wind at their backs. And now, instead of being content to let the All-Stars try to score, the Tigers were making sweeping drives at their opponents' goal . . . with the hope of improving their score while the wind favored. It was a masterful exhibition of ice hockey, the battle these two teams were putting up . . . an exhibition which held the spectators so wonderfully enthralled that they did not hear an ominous sound . . .

All save Willard. Greatly disappointed, he had turned from the game to hide his feelings, skating about behind the wall of spectators, hands behind back . . . head downcast. The ominous sound had come at the moment of an

exceptional play, with the rink a riot of yells . . . and it is no wonder that none heard it . . . except Willard. He straightened up, unbelievingly, and looked anxiously toward the shore line . . . a quarter mile away . . . south. Traverse City, nestling between the foothills, at the end of Grand Traverse Bay . . . a town looking dark and smudgy now as any town was apt to look at that time of the year . . .

There! That peculiar sound again . . . a sharp, rumbling crack! And—some distance out from shore—a rippling, running stretch of open water!

Willard's heart stopped still . . . then commenced a rapid pounding. The ice was going out! *The ice was going out!*

Willard's first impulse was to shriek the danger and dash madly for shore in the race to beat the cracking slit which was quickly cutting off every hope of escape. A few minutes at the most and they would be marooned . . . on an ice floe . . . with a strong south wind to blow them out past Marion island, eight miles away, and into Lake Michigan!

Willard did shriek but he did not run. His

shriek was lost in the excited roar of the game. The All-Stars had just scored!

Before the referee could put the puck in play again, a whizzing form burst upon the rink, waving its arms to attract attention and pointing toward the south.

"Beat it for shore everybody! Beat it, quick! The ice is going out!"

There were perhaps three hundred hockey enthusiasts in the crowd. And none of the three hundred needed so much as a second bidding. In the pulsating ten minutes that followed the rush across the ice did credit to the wildest kind of a stock stampede. Already it was necessary to veer to the right to reach a point where the ice was still intact, straining to the shore ice with a lingering grip in the face of the pull exerted by the widening gulf of open water. On the shore a few dancing figures shouted encouragement, their voices carrying out to the threatened ones on the howling breath of the wind.

Willard, bringing up the rear with members of both teams, saw the first of the three hundred pass the danger point and turn to urge the others on. Another ominous crack . . . a

crack which caused the ice to tremble underfoot . . . and more open water appeared . . . so that those trying to reach shore were forced to veer again to the right. There were cries of terror now . . . and a few making running jumps over the fresh water gap.

"Say!" gasped Jerry, swinging alongside Willard, wide-eyed, "*We've* got to hurry!"

Carl Bond joined the two.

"Our skates . . . this rough ice!" he said.

But there was no time to stop and jerk skates off. Each second was infinitely precious. Other team members were having the same difficulty . . . stumbling . . . slipping . . . yet struggling on. And it is possible that all might have made it, had it not been for one individual. That individual was Crippled Charlie . . . a boy of about fourteen years who owned a useless right leg. Crippled Charlie had been a familiar figure at all kinds of athletic contests for years and he would not have missed this one for the world. He hadn't either . . . but he had missed getting ashore . . . at least, he had dragged himself along—his useless leg swinging and bumping over the ice—until he could go no further. He fell on hands and knees just ten feet from

safety . . . to stare in horror as a gurgling line of water oozed through a crack in front of him.

Jerry, Carl and Willard were the last ones to reach the point at which they could cross to shore ice and security. A yawning crack was now coming from the right to join the one working from the left. Soon the great strip of ice would be free . . . and then the action of the water would begin breaking it up in smaller pieces under the lash of the wind.

"Help, fellers . . . help!"

Willard looking back, and hearing frenzied shouts from those nearer shore, bit his lips . . . and pretended not to have seen. No, no! He couldn't turn back. He couldn't . . . why . . . why . . . it meant . . .! Jerry and Carl heard, too, and glanced back . . . and consulted each other with terror-stricken looks.

"Help, fellers . . . You'se wouldn't go and leave me?"

Willard brought himself to a stop . . . giving a nervous, calculating flash of his head to right and left. There was just a chance . . . if Jerry and Carl would help. Willard clutched Jerry's arm.

"Come on . . . let's go back . . . we'll have to carry him . . .!"

It was a time for quick decision. In the second that it took Jerry and Carl to decide, Willard was already on his way to the unfortunate youth.

"Quick! Can you help yourself?" Willard asked, as he stooped over Crippled Charlie.

"No—my good leg . . . I twisted something in the knee . . .!"

Jerry and Carl were on hand now.

"Put your arms around these fellows' necks!" Willard directed of Charlie, "I'll take your feet!" He stepped between the crippled youth's legs and laid hold of the ankles. Jerry and Carl lifted Charlie free of the ice and the three, with their human cargo, were started now on the race to safety.

It seemed momentarily as though they would make it . . . even staggering along as they were . . . but a sudden, lurching crack . . . so violent that it tossed the boys from their feet . . . ripped the huge pan of ice from the shore. A lane of slapping water . . . steaming cold . . . presented the most treacherous of barriers.

Dazed . . . and almost paralyzed with the realization of their perilous situation, the four

marooned, crouched on the ice, watching the ever widening expanse of water . . . and listening to the startling cracking and snapping of the ice on all sides. They were floating rapidly so that the line of excited but helpless people viewing them, seemed to dwindle in size remarkably fast.

"Stick together . . . we'll get a boat to you!" a big voice boomed.

But the boys knew, even then, that such a possibility was one in a thousand. The wind was carrying the ice straight out of the bay and the ice was in such condition that it would prevent a boat's reaching them if a boat could even be launched!

"We're goners!" cried Jerry.

"It—it's all my fault!" sobbed Charlie, "I shouldn't have called you back!"

"Oh, that's all right, kid! Gee, whizz!" said Carl. But he looked anxiously and debatingly at the water. "A strong swimmer might be able to make it!"

"No chance," decided Jerry, "I thought of that . . . the water's too cold . . . you'd go down sure."

A crackling almost underfoot caused them to start in alarm.

"We've got to move farther back . . . this

ice is breaking up along the edges," advised Willard. "Give a hand to Charlie."

"Never mind me, guys," begged the cripple, "Just save yourselves. I didn't mean to get you'se into this!"

But there was nothing that any of the trio could do for themselves except wait hopefully . . . fearfully . . . and, in the meantime, keep moving so as to be on safe ice. A large piece they were on now jostled toward the left and the east shoreline . . . but the piece was a good half mile out . . . with ice-capped water in between. At the Wequetong Club the boys could just discern some activity . . . men trying to get a boat out through the Boardman river which emptied into the bay. Several men stood in the bow with what appeared to be long poles, pushing ice cakes out of the way. For half an hour, the four marooned strained their eyes in an endeavor to follow the progress of the boat. Then Jerry exclaimed, in great depth of spirit:

"They're turning back!"

Apparently the would-be rescuers had become convinced of the utter impossibility of reaching the boys from that point. Instead, they had turned the boat toward shore and . . .

The boys gave a shout.

"They're going to mount the boat on a truck!" voiced Willard. "And carry it around the bay shore to a place where they can find open water and get out to us!"

Another ray of hope at this . . . a faint ray. Another priceless half hour . . . with dots of men swarming about the truck like gnats . . . working furiously to get the boat out of the water and ready to be transported. The boys never saw this task finished as the drifting ice carried it beyond their vision. But they took to watching the shore road now . . . anxiously . . . wildly . . . for trace of the truck and its eye-gladdening load.

"The . . . roads are in terrible shape this time of year," said Carl, finally.

"If something's happened to the truck!" suggested Jerry, running fingers nervously through his hair, "if it's got stuck some place . . . or broken down . . . !

"Shut up!" snapped Willard.

Jerry and Carl stared at the fellow who had been branded as yellow in surprise. Willard had hardly opened his mouth since they had been marooned. He had spent most of his time kneeling beside Crippled Charlie . . . and shiv-

ering from head to foot as though he was suffering from the ague . . . or something . . .

"What's biting you?" asked Jerry, irritably.

"Nothing . . . only quit talking about what *might* happen. That doesn't do us any good. It only . . . it only *gets* our nerve!"

"*Our* nerve!" scoffed Jerry, but his own voice trembled in the scoffing.

How the wind did howl now! And how the ice pans did creak and jam as they sloshed against one another! But a new peril was about to add itself to the others . . . it was growing dark. Late afternoon was creeping upon them. In half an hour it would be dusk under the lowering clouds. And the air was warming . . . it looked like rain!

It had been some time since any of the boys had sighted so much as a human along the west bay shore. They had stared greedily at every foot of the shore as they had floated past . . . hoping to see someone whose attention they could flag by waving . . . or someone who already knew of their plight and was making an effort to rescue them . . . but the shore, for the most part, looked bleak . . . with no sign of activity. At one place a man was down by the bay's edge with a canoe which he had

dragged from a shelter. But there was no place for him to launch it safely and he had been forced to stand by, motioning his regret to the boys. It had been Willard's thought that the man had been reached by telephone and petitioned to do what he could to reach them. Well, the ice was breaking up faster now . . . they would be compelled to take to the water then . . . and . . . and that would be the end!

"I'm sorry, fellers . . . I'm sorry . . . !" babbled Charlie, hysterically.

"Keep still!" ordered Willard, controlling his nerves with difficulty. "See, we're being pushed nearer shore . . . the ice is piling up. We're not lost yet!"

There *was* truth in Willard's statement. A temporary block had developed out off the island which had retarded the progress of the ice floe and was forcing the portion they were on to swing nearer the shore line. Breathlessly . . . prayerfully . . . the four marooned watched the watery stretch between them and the shore line simmer down, foot by foot. Finally a quarter of a mile, roughly figured, of mostly open water except for occasional bobbing lumps of ice . . . loomed as the grim barrier.

"Gee, if they could only get out opposite us!" wished Jerry. "They could launch a boat there easy . . . and we're not hardly moving now!"

"There's a boat house on shore . . . it may have a boat in it!" observed Willard.

"And not a person in sight!" groaned Carl.

Willard gazed out toward the island and the pile of whining and moaning ice . . . then up at the scurrying clouds . . . the settling dusk. He felt his body tingling from head to foot with a strange emotion . . . a terrible, gnawing fear . . . such a fear as he had never known . . . a fear which seemed to stab into his very marrow. He had willed himself into this situation. Safety would have been his with but one more leap . . . at one time. But he had chosen to turn back. Now Willard instinctively knew that he was coming to the moment of moments. The moment when he would be forced to face the sternest of issues . . . an issue in which there could be not the slightest turning back . . . an issue which must be met unflinching . . . an issue which would test the true color of him . . .

Willard sunk teeth into his lips and clenched his fingers.

"Oh, God . . . please don't let it be yellow," he said. Then he turned upon Jerry and Carl. "Fellows, we've just got one chance. Looks like this is the nearest we can ever hope of getting to shore. Now . . . you're both good swimmers . . . if either of you . . ."

Jerry and Carl exchanged sharp looks, then glared at Willard bitterly.

"So that's it, eh?"

"Great idea!"

"You'd both have a much better chance of making it than I," Willard attempted to reason. "And if you got ashore . . . the boathouse . . ."

Jerry looked longingly at the little building referred to . . . then down at the water . . . and shuddered.

"Nothing stirring!" he said, "Not till . . . till we have to . . .it's like ice . . . we couldn't go a hundred feet . . . !"

"*You* might try it, though," interposed Carl, dryly.

"No, he's not a good enough swimmer," informed Jerry, mockingly. "That lets *him* out. Pretty soft!"

But the team captain started at a significant

motion of the fellow he had branded as yellow. Willard was down on one knee, tugging at his shoe laces!

"I'm going," he announced quietly, marvelling at his own steel-like calmness. "If I get to shore . . . I'll try to get a boat . . . and come back . . . you fellows stick by Charlie . . ."

Jerry and Carl put fumbling fingers to their faces to try and stop the throbbing sensation in their temples.

"No, Will . . . you mustn't . . . you can't . . . no one can . . . !" It was Jerry, broken and crying.

"Don't let him go!" screamed Charlie, reaching up as though to grab Willard.

By this time the fellow with the slenderly built body was stripped to his underwear, trembling in the gale . . . but face taut with determination.

"Let me go!" he pleaded. "I'd rather go now than wait . . . go while there's still a chance . . . It . . . it doesn't look like help's coming . . . in time . . ."

Jerry and Carl scanned the shore horizon. Darkness was settling over the hills. They looked back to Willard, hopefully.

"Gee, if you could make it!" exclaimed Jerry, impulsively.

Willard gave no answer. He crept to the edge of the ice floe and bent down to feel the water. Then, crouching, he cupped up a handful and splashed it over his chest and stomach. The shock of it made him wince. Jerry and Carl, watching, saw Willard waver and catch his breath in a sobbing gulp. Then they saw him bend down again and repeat the process . . . not once but several times . . . until the front of him dripped with ice-tempered water. Looking back, Willard called.

"You'd better loosen your clothes so you can slip them off easily," he advised. "You may have to take to the water any minute. But wait, if you can, to see if I . . . if I make it!"

Willard waved his hand.

"Goodbye, fellows! Goodbye, Charlie!"

He was in the water before they could reply, striking out briskly with the breast stroke . . . the only stroke he knew. Crippled Charlie turned his head away.

"I can't look, guys . . . I can't look . . . is he . . . is he still . . .?"

"Yeah . . . all right . . . so far," mumbled

Jerry, eyes intent upon the figure in the water. Then to Carl, the fellow he had substituted for Willard: "How does he stand it . . . tell me that . . . how does he stand it . . .?"

Carl shook his head, tears brimming his eyes.

"I—I don't know. He's swum a good half block. I—I guess you made a mistake about him being yellow, Jerry . . ."

The team captain nodded, a smarting sensation in his throat.

It might have done the fellow in the water a great deal of good could he have heard this comment. It seemed to him just now as though the whole shore line had turned a sickening yellow color . . . a yellow haze which bekoned on and on . . . and which faded out just as he was about to reach it. The coldness of the water knifed him through and through. It pained him to draw breath. He felt cramps in his fingers and wondered how soon it would be before a cramp gripped the muscles of his legs . . . or . . . or stomach. It was torturous . . . every stroke . . . but not so torturous if the next stroke could be his last. It was the consciousness that he must forever keep this stroking up that plagued Willard. His body was

growing numb . . . it would be easy to slip beneath the water into a shadowy numbness . . . to rest there for awhile. Several times he let his head go under . . . and came up . . . choking . . . his throat prickling with cold wetness. This would not do. There was Jerry, Carl . . . and Charlie . . .back there on the ice . . . counting on him . . . the boathouse . . .where was it. Lost . . . in a yellow haze!

"Go on, Willard! Go on! Go on!" screamed Jerry, frantically.

"Keep it up, old boy! You're almost there!" shrieked Carl.

"Oh, God . . . let him get ashore, won't you'se?" implored Charlie, not looking up.

The shouts came to Willard faintly. He could not hear what was being said. He did not even know where the shouts were coming from. His eyes ached so . . . his whole head was splitting there were stabbing pains throughout his whole body . . . his arms seemed like heavy chunks of ice . . . his legs also. He couldn't take another stroke. He . . . just . . . couldn't . . .

On the ice floe, Jerry and Carl suddenly hugged each other with as great joy as though their safety was assured.

"He made it! He made it!"

On the ice, near the shore line, the prostrate figure of a slenderly built youth lay, face downward. Open water lapped at his feet . . . but it no longer tugged at his body.

"He—he doesn't get up," said Crippled Charlie, and sank down upon the ice again.

Jerry and Carl glanced at one another apprehensively. The effort had exhausted Willard. He had reached shore but was in no condition to aid in their rescue. They were in just as helpless a position as before. Jerry began pulling at his clothes.

"I'm next," he said, grimly. If Willard made it, I ought to be able to . . ."

There was courage in another's example. But Carl caught at Jerry's sleeve.

"No—wait! He . . . he's moving!"

The figure on the shore ice raised slowly upon hands and knees . . . and turned to stare out at the figures on the ice floe. Lifting an arm, the figure tried to wave, stiffly . . . and staggered to its feet. In tottering fashion the figure lunged shoreward in the direction of the boathouse. Watching, the trio on the ice floe saw the figure try the door and then look about . . . and finally lay hold of a plank imbedded

in the ice nearby. After some clumsy wrenchings the plank came loose, so suddenly that the figure toppled over backwards. But it was up again in a long minute . . . using the plank to batter at what they surmised to be a padlock. Presently the figure dropped the plank and strained against the door . . . and the door was seen to pull open.

"Ah—a boat!" cried Jerry, tremulously. "A row boat!"

The boat was on rollers so that, when the figure laid hold of its gunwale, it slipped easily out of the boathouse upon the crust ice. The figure groped in the bottom of the boat . . . then followed around to the stern . . . peering . . . and finally disappeared within the boathouse.

"He—he's looking for the oars!" deduced Carl.

The figure emerged from the boathouse—empty-handed . . . and stooped down, drunkenly, and picked up the plank . . . tossing it in the boat. Then the watchers on the ice floe saw the figure tug and pull and pull and tug . . . to get the boat launched in the open water.

"There—she's in!" cried Jerry, joyfully.

And the figure was in, too . . . falling flat in the boat at the shove-off.

Up ahead, just off the island where the ice jam had taken place, came a grinding, creaking shudder. Simultaneous with this the ice floe resumed its movement . . . sluggishly . . . And, from above, came the first pelting drops of rain.

"He won't get to us any too soon!" voiced Carl, in growing alarm.

"Hurry up!" shouted Jerry, and regretted the shout a moment later, for the fellow he had branded as yellow was making toward them as fast as the plank oar would propel the boat.

Willard did not know how he had found the strength to do what he was doing. He was blue with cold . . . teeth chattering . . . body quivering so that he could hardly bend to his task . . . but, with it all, he was getting there!

"Look . . . on shore!" directed Charlie, raising up.

A light auto, full of men, had driven up on the shore road. The men leaped out and ran down to the icy beach and cried their encouragement. It was evident that they had no means of rescue at their command.

"Bring Charlie over . . . close to the edge . . . ." directed Willard, when he had gotten close enough for the trio to hear him.

Jerry and Carl complied, cautiously.

It was raining hard now and dusk was upon them . . . so that the boat was but a dark shadow . . . It bumped against the ice floe finally . . . and Jerry, reaching out, grabbed it. The ice broke as they were lifting Charlie over the side but Willard hauled the crippled youth into the boat and steadied the craft while Jerry and Carl crawled in . . . from the water. Then, with the realization that all were safely aboard, Willard slumped to the bottom of the boat, unconscious.

Jerry and Carl were almost an hour getting the boat ashore. The wind had whipped up quite a wash as the ice had swirled into motion . . . and the plank was an unwieldy oar at best. They made Willard as comfortable as possible during this time—putting their own clothes about him and taking turns rubbing him briskly as the other one paddled. But once the boat touched shore ice there was plenty of help awaiting. Men with great, heavy blankets . . . hot coffee . . . dry clothes . . . even a doctor!

The boys were rushed a half mile to the nearest house, where a roaring fire had been built in the fireplace. It seemed wonderfully good to be inside, with the slashing patter of the rain and the sound of the wind where it couldn't get at them . . . and, nothing moving under their feet!

"Lucky for you that Mason got ashore," one of the men told Jerry and Carl. "The truck's in to her axles about two miles from the city . . . and we had our own troubles getting out to you . . ."

Jerry and Carl turned away to tiptoe toward the bedroom door where Willard was confined. They met the doctor coming out.

"How—how is he?"

"He's coming around all right," the physician announced. "But he's slightly delirious. He wants to know if he's still yellow . . . and if he isn't . . . can he play his position against the West Side Tigers?"

"Can he?" Jerry's eyes dimmed. "Well, you tell the big wide world, he can!"

THE WHITE LIE

"HELLO! Look at those skates, will you? Aren't they beauties?"

Norman Macy stopped, his glance following that of his chum, Dale Saunders. By mutual consent the two, on their way home from school, moved over to the Bailey Hardware Store window and stood, looking in. A most attractive winter display had been arranged . . . skiis, sleds, hockey outfits, sweaters, kits and—what was most alluring to Norman and Dale—a marvelous assortment of ice skates!

Each had wanted a pair since the beginning of the winter season, but neither had been able to afford it. Dale's old pair had been broken, a clamp having snapped off. Norman had fallen through the ice and, in getting out, had left one of his skates on the bottom of the lake. For the past ten days both boys had been forced to remain off the ice except as they had been

able to borrow skates from schoolmates when not in use.

"Oh, boy! Look at that King Cutter pair!" raved Norman. "Wouldn't I like to have them!"

"Those are just the kind Larry Edwards has!" informed Dale. "Gee, isn't he lucky to have a rich Dad! . . . I've been saving my small change for weeks. I figured I'd be able to get a pair last Saturday but Mom took sick and . . ."

"How *is* your mother?" broke in Norman, recollecting. "I'd clean forgotten to ask you, and my mother wanted to know . . ."

"She . . . I guess she's not so good," answered Dale, reluctantly. "We've had the doctor twice. That's where my skating money went. He said Mom shouldn't work like she's been working any more. He said doing all those washings was killing her. But she won't give up . . . she says she'll be around again in a few days . . . I hope so. It's taking all my paper and magazine money to . . . Gee, Norm, look at the edge on those Cutters! Isn't it *keen?*"

"And the hockey team starts practice next week!" reminded Norman, wistfully. "Not a

chance for us unless . . . Say! Wouldn't you like to get in that game against Mapleton?"

Dale whistled.

"I cannot tell a lie," he mocked, "I sure *would!*"

"Come on," urged Norman, taking Dale by the arm, "This window's no place for us. We could stand here all day, looking at those skates, and we wouldn't be any nearer having them. Let's turn our backs on temptation!"

"Some temptation, all right!" confessed Dale, turning his back but turning his head also, that he might keep his eyes on the skates as long as he was within seeing distance.

The two chums parted at the corner, as was their custom.

"See you tomorrow!" called Norman.

"If *I* don't see you first!" joshed Dale.

The following morning Dale did not appear at school. His mother had had a turn for the worse and the doctor had said that someone should be with her at all times.

That evening Norman, enticed by the skating on Boardman Lake, watched the skaters under a moonlight sky until close to midnight. Not having possessed any skates of his own this

year had greatly increased his craving for the winter sport. But there was some consolation in watching others enjoying that which he longed to be doing.

The business streets of the town were quite deserted as Norman made his way home with a feeling of guilt at having permitted himself to remain out so late. He was supposed to have been home and in bed shortly after nine o'clock.

"Mother'll probably be worried," he thought. "But, gee . . . if she only knew how I liked skating and how much I miss . . . !

Norman was startled, as he crossed the alleyway, at the emergence of a figure which appeared to be in a great hurry. The two almost collided with one another.

"Dale!" cried Norman, surprised, as he caught a glimpse of the face. "What are *you* doing out this time of night?"

"I might ask the same of you!" Dale answered, in a voice that was strangely sober.

"I've been down taking in the doings at the rink!" Norman informed. "Wow! You gave me a scare . . . busting out of that alley!"

"Shortest way for me," replied Dale, nervously. "Mother's had another spell and I've

just been to the drug store for more medicine . . ."

"Oh, I'm sorry," exclaimed Norman. "Anything I can do?"

"No, thanks, I guess not," said Dale, moving on. "I got to be getting right back. See you later!"

"Good night," Norman called after him. "Hope your mother's lots better in the morning!"

But Dale, on a dog trot, was already out of hearing.

"That's tough!" Norman told himself as he continued on his way. "What would Dale do if anything should happen to her?"

Turning onto Main Street, Norman could not resist the temptation of stealing a look in the Bailey Hardware window and singling out the pair of King Cutters which Dale and he had so ardently admired. He had to go right past the store anyway and it would only take a minute. But as he halted by the window he suddenly became aware of footsteps approaching. Glancing up he beheld the familiar figure of Patrolman Neale sauntering toward him.

"Hel-lo!" greeted the big-framed policeman

as he recognized the youth. "You're out past your bed time, ain't you?"

"Well, just a little bit," laughed Norman, feeling a trifle uneasy. "I'm hitting it for home now."

"You'd better be!" admonished Neale, brandishing his club good-naturedly. "The idee . . . window shoppin' this time o' night!"

Norman hurried on. When he was gone the patrolman went over and peered in the window himself, then chuckled softly.

"Don't know as I blame the kid for bein' stopped by this outlay!" he said, "But I wonder what he could have been doin' out so late? He didn't have no skates or nothin' . . ."

Norman heard in school the next morning that Dale's mother was in a critical condition. It was said that the next forty-eight hours would decide whether her recovery should be despaired of. The students brought some money at noon and the teacher appointed Norman to take up a collection so that flowers could be sent to Dale. Then the class voted that Norman be authorized to make the selection.

"You may be excused now for that purpose if you can be back within half an hour,"

granted Miss Simpson, the teacher in charge.

Norman set off for the florist's. He had hardly crossed the school campus, however, than he encountered Chief of Police Parker and Patrolman Neale.

"Just a minute, son!" called the chief. "We want to see you!"

Norman halted, wonderingly.

"Where you going?" asked Policeman Neale, suspiciously. "Skippin' school . . . ?"

"No, sir!" Norman denied vigorously. "I'm going to the flower shop for my class. You see Dale Saunders' mother's very sick and . . ."

"You come along with us," invited Chief Parker, "and forget that flower shop for awhile."

Norman accompanied the two officers of the law, trying to appear leisurely, as though he were merely walking along, talking to them. But his heart took up an irregular pounding. What had *he* done? What had happened?

At the station house Norman was led into the Chief's private office and told to take a chair. Then the door was closed and the two policemen faced him.

"Where were you last night?" asked the Chief, abruptly.

Norman sat for a moment, fingers tapping nervously on the arms of the chair. So, it was about last night! Something serious must have taken place! And he was under suspicion!

"Why . . . er . . . I . . . I was down at the lake . . . watching them skate," he answered, falteringly.

"For how long?"

Norman could feel the Chief's eyes boring at him. He squirmed uneasily.

"Why, I don't know exactly. I s'pose from about eight-thirty to er . . well . . . maybe eleven-thirty!"

"Eleven-thirty!" repeated the Chief. "Isn't that a pretty late hour for a young man your age to be out . . . just *watching* folks skate?"

"That's what seems so strange to me, Chief," put in Patrolman Neale. "If he'd been doing some skatin' himself it would have been different . . . but . . . just watchin' . . . ! It don't seem reasonable!"

"You're sure that's all you did?"

Norman nodded, finding his throat suddenly dry.

"Yes, sir," he finally managed. "That's all . . . I know I stayed out later than I should . . . but I like skating lots and not being able

to skate myself on account of not having any skates this year . . . well, I . . .”

The Chief and his patrolman exchanged consulting glances.

“Where did you go after you left the rink?”

Norman’s eyes widened.

“Why, I . . . right straight home . . . of course!”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, sir! I couldn’t help thinking how late it was and I was hurrying . . .”

“It doesn’t appear as though you were hurrying when Mr. Neale saw you. You were *standing* . . . looking in the Bailey Hardware window!”

Norman started . . . and bit his lips. What was this cross-examination leading to anyway?

“Well, I . . . I did stop that once . . . just to. . . to take a squint at a pair of skates that I . . .”

Patrolman Neale nodded wisely.

“You wanted some money to buy those skates, didn’t you?” charged the Chief, suddenly.

Norman flinched. What did *they* know about his wanting to buy skates?

“No, sir!” he denied, hotly. “That is . . . well . . . not the way you meant! I’d like to

have the skates all right. I've been saving money for them, too . . . but I . . .!"

"But you didn't break into the City Newsstand and take the subscription box with the week's collections in . . . is *that* what you were going to say?" fired the Chief.

Norman leaned forward in his chair, shocked.

"Mr. Parker!" he cried, when he could find utterance, "I don't know anything about that! Honest! This is the first I've heard of it!"

Chief Parker studied him intently.

"And the only time you stopped on your way home was to look in the Bailey Hardware window?"

"Yes, sir!" answered Norman, staunchly.

"You're certain of that?"

"Yes, sir!"

"All right . . . then tell us what you did when you met Dale Saunders?"

Norman felt the perspiration creep out on his forehead. The cloak of circumstantial evidence seemed to be fitting close around him.

"Oh, I—I'd forgotten *Dale*," answered Norman, exercising greater caution. "That's so . . . I did run into him. He came out of the alley from right by the . . . the . . . er . . ." Norman hesitated, bewildered.

"Go on!" ordered the Chief.

"I—I'd rather not, sir," begged Norman, his mind now alert to the situation as he realized that his replies might prove incriminating to someone besides himself.

"You might as well tell all you know," encouraged Patrolman Neale. "We've got the story pretty straight."

"You say your friend came out of the alley from right by *what* . . . ?" insisted the Chief.

"From right by the . . . the *City Newsstand!*" finished Norman, hoarsely, feeling as though he were being forced into something contemptible.

It looked very much as though Dale were the guilty one! He'd thought it rather peculiar last night that Dale had taken to the alley. He remembered now how nervous Dale had seemed when he had run into him . . . accidentally . . . and how Dale had explained that the alley was a shortcut for him . . . on the way to the drug store. Why should they accuse him of wanting a pair of skates? Dale had wanted a pair every bit as bad! But why should Dale have thought to do such a thing . . . rob a store . . . with his mother lying so desperately ill? Ah! Perhaps Dale had reasoned that no one would have sus-

pected him at such a time. And he had known just how to get into the store, working there every day as he did . . . handling a paper route and selling magazines. Last night Dale had not wanted to stand and talk. He had wanted to be getting right back home. Probably he'd left home when his mother was asleep and had been anxious to return before she should awaken and miss him. That was it! There was the solution! But why were the police concerned with *him*?

"You were rather surprised to see Dale, weren't you?" asked the Chief, meaningly.

Norman thought well of this question before giving answer. Was he being quizzed with a view to being guilty or to contribute evidence of someone else's guilt? It almost seemed as though it were the former! And then there came to Norman an electrifying thought. He had, in his trouser's pocket at the present moment, more than seven dollars in small change! The money he had collected for the flowers! What if he should be searched and this money found? . . . The money in the subscription box would be made up of small change, too! Of course he could prove that this money wasn't the subscription box money, but . . . ! Norman

felt an instinctive shudder go through him. Chief Parker, noticing this, spoke up.

"How about it? Were you surprised to see Dale, or weren't you?"

"I—I guess we were both surprised," answered Norman, carefully. "You see it was away past the time that we were usually out. And so we . . . we sort of kidded each other about it!"

"You did? What did you say?"

"Why, as near as I remember, I said, 'What are you doing out this time of night? '"

The Chief's eyes gleamed.

"And what did Dale say to that?"

Norman laughed nervously.

"He—he kidded me back. He asked me what *I* was doing out!"

"But you thought it mighty queer for him to be coming out of an alley!" declared the Chief, slyly.

Norman's face flushed. He shifted his position in the chair.

"You're not forgetting, Chief, that Dale admitted he thought it was mighty queer to be running into *Norman* where he did!" reminded Patrolman Neale.

Dale! So they had cross-examined Dale and

Dale had said that? Norman stiffened. Probably Dale had told them, too, how he had wanted those skates . . . Well, Dale wasn't going to make him out the *guilty one!*

"Dale wanted a pair of skates, too!" charged Norman. "If that's what you're suspicious of me about!"

"That's all!" snapped Chief Parker, with an air of satisfaction. "You stay where you are. We're going to send someone in to see you!"

"Please, sir!" Norman called after the departing officers. "I'm expected back at school in half an hour. "Can't I call Miss Simpson and tell her I . . .?"

"Don't you worry about that," replied the Chief, with gruff reassurance. "It'll all be explained soon enough!"

Norman, left to himself, took to pacing anxiously up and down the little room. If he could only get in touch with his parents! They would know that he hadn't been mixed up in this . . . this robbery! But—*would* they? He'd never stayed out so late before after promising to be in early . . . and his mother had waited up for him and asked him where he had been and what

he had been doing. Now, if she learned that he had been suspected of . . . ! Norman groaned.

"I didn't do it!" he cried. "And I'll bet that Dale . . . !"

Norman did not finish for the fellow of whom he had started to speak stepped into the room. Dale's eyes were bloodshot from lack of sleep . . . and for another reason. His face revealed him to be laboring under a great strain. For a long moment the two chums stood regarding each other. It was evident that each thought the other guilty. And each, because of this, nursed a feeling of resentment.

"Well . . . ?" said Norman at last.

"You think I did it, don't you?" retorted Dale, bluntly.

"You've sure got *me* in a fine mess!" Norman answered, evasively. "I'll say *that* much!"

"*You!*" cried Dale. "What about *me?*" His lips quivered and the bloodshot eyes blurred. "I don't care what *you* think!" he went on, chokingly. "But it's mother . . . if she'd get wind of this now . . . it'ud kill her! . . . I didn't try to frame you, Norm—honest! They quizzed all the newsboys this morning and I . . . and I . . . of course I didn't have to tell about going to the drug store for Mom . . .

but I did! . . . And then I happened to think about meeting you . . . and I told them about that, too . . ."

"And about my wanting those King Cutter skates!" charged Norman. "I know what you told them! No, you didn't try to frame on me! Oh, no!"

Dale looked his surprise.

"I didn't say a word about your wanting any skates! Cross my heart!"

Norman gave vent to a biting laugh of scorn.

"I suppose you didn't say you thought it was strange to see me out so late?" he taunted.

It was Dale's turn to exhibit a flash of scorn.

"I didn't tell them I was surprised till they asked me. But I really *was*. I hadn't ever seen you out that late before. You wouldn't have had me tell a *lie*, would you?"

Norman looked about him worriedly.

"Be careful!" Norman warned. "They're probably listening to everything we say!"

"What if they are?" blazed Dale. "I didn't do anything!"

There was a moment of prickling silence.

"Perhaps they think we're both guilty!" said Norman, suddenly.

Dale gave Norman a withering glance.

"We know better than that!" he replied, pointedly. Then the realization of the situation he was in came once more before him. "But they can't hold me, Norm! . . . Mother'll begin to wonder. I've already been away from the house almost two hours. Mrs. Benson, the neighbor woman's in . . . but Mom's sure to be asking for me. I got to get out of this somehow. If Mom dies . . . !"

Norman felt his own eyes grow hot . . . then moist. Regardless of what he thought of Dale, he *could* sympathize. He knew how badly *he* had wanted those skates. What if he, instead of Dale, had gone to the drugstore and cut through the alley past the newsstand . . . and knew there was money inside . . . subscription money . . . and that the chances were nobody would connect him up with stealing it? . . . And this money—it would buy the skates in Bailey's Hardware window! What would he—Norman—have done? . . . A temptation? . . . Well, it might have been but he would have put it aside. He was sure of it. But he wasn't Dale.

There was the sound of the doorknob turning. Chief Parker and patrolman Neale re-entered.

"Well, boys," said the Chief, sternly. "Ready to confess?"

Dale looked at Norman and Norman looked at Dale. Dale turned away, almost overcome.

"Oh, Mom!" he sobbed under his breath. "I didn't do it! They're trying to make out that I did it!"

Norman put a hand in his trousers' pocket, the pocket containing the handkerchief which bulged with the pennies and nickels and dimes and quarters. He fingered the small change debatingly. Why not? They couldn't really prove he was guilty. Not in the long run. But he could make it look as though he was guilty and get Dale off free . . . so Dale could be with his mother . . . and then later . . . if Dale wanted to come clean . . . ! Norman pulled out the knotted handkerchief and dropped it on the Chief's desk.

"All right," he said. "I did it. There's part of the money. I hid the rest. You're all wrong about Dale. He didn't have anything to do with it. I just happened to run into him after I . . . after I'd made the steal!"

The Chief untied the handkerchief and motioned to the patrolman to count the coins. Norman sank down in a chair, dropping his chin to his chest, tears trickling down his tie in front.

"Gee, Norm . . . I—I'm sorry!" said Dale, putting out his hand. "But—but thanks for speaking up and . . . and telling it straight. Please, Mr. Parker, can't I go now? My mother, she's . . ."

"Go ahead, son. Sorry we had to keep you this long."

Norman was detained while the probationary officer was called in and a written confession secured. Norman spent three-quarters of an hour writing it. It seemed to him for all the world like working on a story assignment for his English class. Not a word of what he put down appeared real to him . . . and he found himself wondering if it would appear real to anyone who should read it. But it must! He didn't know how the newsstand had been entered but it seemed most logical to presume that it had been through the window . . . so he gave a graphic account of how he had forced the window open . . . and crawled in. He had been in the little store many times with Dale, so it wasn't quite so hard imagining how he got the money. On signing his confession, Norman waited breathlessly while Mr. Howard, the probationary officer, read it over, approved of it and passed it on to Chief Parker. Then Nor-

man's parents were notified and the hardest part of the ordeal was upon him.

"My son," said Mr. Macy, broken-heartedly. "If I had only known how badly you wanted the skates I'd have managed somehow to get them for you . . . anything to have saved you from such a disgraceful act as this!"

The father appealed to the probationary officer and the chief of police for Norman's freedom, giving his word that the boy would be available when wanted.

"He'll have to appear in court the day after tomorrow," advised Chief Parker. "But before we let him go with you, we'll let him take us to the place where he's hidden the rest of the money!"

Norman appeared willing. He led the officers to the hollowed out tree at the edge of the school campus, being followed by a crowd of curious townspeople. Kicking away the snow at the foot, Norman directed Patrolman Neale to reach his arm in the hole. The policeman got down on his knees and painfully executed Norman's directions. He felt about for several awkward moments.

"I don't find it," he announced, finally. "You

know better where you put it. You get down here!"

Norman knelt and plunged his own arm into the tree. He waited appreciable seconds, then withdrew it with what he hoped was a dazed expression.

"The money's gone!" he cried. "Somebody's taken it!"

Late that night, confined to his room at home while police still sought to unravel some of the mysteries of the case, Norman inquired anxiously as to the condition of Dale's mother. He was somewhat consoled to learn that she seemed some better.

The following day school authorities interested themselves in Norman's affair. Principal Trumbull declared that it seemed inconceivable a boy of his character could be guilty. Miss Simpson decided to conduct a little investigation of her own. First she went to the florist and asked him if Norman had been there to order the flowers. No, he had not. Armed with this information, Miss Simpson called at the Saunders' home and asked Dale if he would be good enough to walk around the block with her. Dale obliged, wonderingly.

"How is your mother?" asked Miss Simpson, kindly.

"She—she's better, thanks. The doctor says, if she keeps on improving . . . if she doesn't have a relapse . . ."

"I understand. She mustn't meet with a shock of any sort, is that it?"

Dale started, giving Miss Simpson a searching glance.

"Listen, Dale, do you really think that Norman's guilty?"

Dale stooped to pick up a rounded piece of ice. He pitched it at a tree before answering.

"I don't have to think. Norman's confessed. That ends it!"

Miss Simpson shook her head.

"No, it doesn't end it. Not by a good deal! Dale, you knew that the money Norman turned over to the police was money that he had collected at school to buy flowers for your mother! Why did you let him plead guilty?"

The thunderstruck expression on Dale's face had every semblance of being genuine. Miss Simpson decided that he was a most remarkable juvenile actor.

"*What?* . . . Why, Miss Simpson . . . NO!"

"I haven't said anything to anyone about this

yet, Dale. I've come straight to you. I'm giving you your chance to make things right."

Dale stopped dead still, hands in his pockets, lips quivering.

"And . . . and Norman did that for *me!*" he breathed. "On account of Mom! . . . Please, Miss Simpson . . . don't say anything to anybody till tomorrow! By tomorrow the doctor says we'll know one way or the other about mother. I—I'll fix things up tomorrow, Miss Simpson. Honest!"

Miss Simpson laid a sympathetic hand on Dale's shoulder.

"I'm sure you'll feet better for doing it," she said, softly. "It was mighty white of Norman to take the blame because of your mother's condition . . ."

"You . . . you bet it was!" said Dale, biting his lips.

The courtroom was crowded the next morning. It was seldom that a local event stirred the community as much as this one had. But everyone was interested in the case of a boy who had wanted a pair of skates so badly that he had broken into the City Newsstand and stolen money with which he had hoped to buy them.

In this instance very little ceremony would be wasted. The boy had already admitted his guilt. He would merely be called upon to face the judge, confess again to the charges filed against him so that these charges could be made a matter of court record, and then the judge would pronounce the punishment. It was rumored that the penalty would include a year at the state reformatory. Pretty stiff sentence for a first offender, but Judge Knox was noted for making examples before the law. Let other youths take warning in the way the court disposed of Norman Macy!

The spectators leaned forward and a hush fell over the court room as the judge cleared his throat and prepared to impose the sentence. But the silence was not broken by the judge's voice. It was broken rather by a voice and a clamor outside in the corridor.

"Let me go! . . . I'm the one who did it, I tell you! Norman's innocent! . . . He just said he did it to protect me! Hey, Judge Knox!"

The judge was a man of authority. He disdained interruptions. Clearing his throat once more the judge sought to proceed, trusting the orderlies at the door to restore quiet. But sud-

NIP GROVELED IN THE SNOW AND JERRY, EYES ABLAZE, PUSHED BUCK BACK.

denly the crowd parted and a disheveled youth appeared in the aisle.

"You can't convict him, Judge! . . . Not when *I* did it! . . . Please, sir . . . let me tell the court all about it!"

Confounded and considerably embarrassed, yielding to the pressure of the crowd, Judge Knox invited the overwrought youth up before the bar, and—though it was not the best legal procedure, permitted Dale Saunders to have his say.

At the finish there was not an eye in the court room that was dry.

"He did it all for my mother," acknowledged Dale, turning to Norman, who sat with head bowed, "and . . now that the doctor says she'll live . . . I . . . I . . ."

Overcome, Dale dropped down by the rail near the chum who had shouldered the blame for him, and buried his face in his arms.

"I—I'm sorry, Dale," said Norman, in a low voice, "but I'm glad, too . . . glad that your mother's going to be all right. I knew you wouldn't let me go through with this."

Dale, beyond words, reached out a hand and clasped Norman's knee.

"I—I only hope he can suspend my sentence for a little while . . . till mother gets up and around again . . ."

Norman slipped gently out of his seat, inside the rail, and up to the judge. The crowded courtroom murmured its suspense. Judge Knox sat, blinking straight ahead as Norman addressed him in a pleading voice . . . a voice which wavered . . . and finally broke. The murmur in the courtroom grew to a loud buzzing. The judge picked up his gavel and rapped sharply. But there was another commotion at the door. Patrolman Neale was shouldering his way in.

"If you please, Your Honor!" he beseeched.

"What is it?" demanded the court.

"We've just had a wire from Carson City," informed the policeman, "They've caught a man there who tried to break into a clothing store last night . . . and he's confessed to robbing the newsstand!"

Judge Knox dropped his gavel, it rolled off the high rostrum and went clattering to the floor. Norman, with a look of stupefied amazement, turned to gaze down upon Dale who looked up at Norman, equally stunned. Every individual in the crowded courtroom gave a great

gasp for breath. Then the spectators, perhaps realizing that Judge Knox was at a loss without his gavel, let their breath out in a most disorderly cheer. But the Judge, to prove that the law was human, got down from his seat and offered his hand to the two youths who had confronted him.

"Suppose there's a good perjury case against both of you," he remarked, "But, in consideration of the unusual circumstances, and on your promise that you'll never tell a lie again, I'll excuse you!"

Dale and Norman gave each other consulting glances.

"If you can do it, I can," said Norman.

"That's just what I was thinking," answered Dale.

And so—they promised! And, though this is only hearsay, George Washington is said to have winked an eye.

NIP AND PUCK

IF, being a stranger in the village of Greentown, you should decide to pass the time away by asking questions about it—the natives would probably begin by telling you that its population consisted of exactly six hundred and three and one-half persons . . . the half going for Nip, the dog, whom everybody said was half human . . . and anyhow, if he wasn't, he was enough of a town character to be included in the census.

Nip was part of what is called the floating population. He had floated into Greentown with one of the snowflakes on a wintry night three years before and had pushed his shivering nose inside Byrl Hedgefellow's general store, attracted by the inviting warmth of the old base burner. When Nip got thawed out he proved to be several good species of appreciative dog, although no one in Greentown could

quite figure out the nature of his pedigree. That wasn't quite necessary anyway because folks in Greentown weren't that particular and Nip had a nice sociable way about him that made up for a lot of doggish shortcomings. He wasn't much to look at but when he looked at you,—well, there was such a pathetic squint to the eyes and such a wistful droop of the shaggy ears that you couldn't help liking him if you tried. He was black and white spotted as if he'd been raised on a crazy quilt and his stubby tail stuck up so stiff that Byrl said "she had froze that way."

Now this starts out as though it was going to be a dog story but that's only because you can't tell anything about Greentown without first mentioning Nip. It's sort of an unwritten law. You see, everybody in Greentown adopted Nip and Nip adopted everybody in Greentown which makes it mighty hard to keep Nip out of the picture.

Take Buck Needham, for instance, than whom there was never a flashier pair of legs on skates! Buck was the idol of Greentown from the time the Mill Pond froze over until the Ides of March returned the water to its liquid state. Boy, how he could carve his initials on ice! And just maybe Buckingham Sylvester Needham didn't

know that he could skate . . . just maybe! If the sun could laugh at the moon because it was so much brighter, Buck could cast reflections at the other fellows in Greentown. He was the big IT. Let the rest of the world look on.

Buck had his crowd of hero-worshippers . . . and Gerald Sawyer was one of them. Jerry could not match Buck for build; he was slender and wiry where Buck was large and brawny. But Jerry was fast on his feet, making up in speed much that he lacked otherwise. If Jerry had possessed a little more gumption he would have dared believe that he could match his skating skill against the mighty Buck . . . and it's just possible that the competition would have been close enough to be interesting. But as it was, Jerry contented himself with following behind—like an obedient satellite, which the dictionary says is a smaller body attending and revolving about a larger one.

Well—it doesn't look as if we're getting anywhere and things aren't going to get much better right off because Nip's nosing in again. The day after he arrived in Greentown he sniffed that there was something going on out at the Mill Pond so he slunk out there to see if he

couldn't stick a paw in it. Dogs are like that . . . especially black and white ones.

What Nip saw was a bunch of Greentown fellows chasing about like mad on the ice, slashing at a little round, flat thing with some funny looking sticks. Every once and awhile the fellows got all tangled up and went down in a heap which made Nip grin and show his tongue in an amused manner. It made him think of a litter of crazy puppies tumbling over one another . . . only the puppies didn't wear any shiny doo dads on their feet and they didn't carry broom handles around with them.

Translated into human terms, what Nip really saw was two picked hockey teams . . . picked by Buck Needham to give him a little competitive entertainment. Of course Buck had put Jerry on the opposing team because, Jerry being the next best skater to him, it pleased Buck to show him up as often as possible . . . which was often enough. Jerry was pitted at center against Buck, giving Buck a chance to dominate the play from the start by the vigor of his stroking which usually pushed Jerry's stick aside and sent the puck skimming down toward Buck's goal.

Ordinarly a body might have resented this

sort of treatment but Greentown was not large enough to be divided off into cliques or clans of rival factions . . . that is, not unless something considerably jarring should have happened. And thus far whoever had nominated himself ringleader had ruled the roost, though it's lucky that no two fellows had nominated themselves at the same time. Just now no one had cause to dispute Buck's supremacy . . . a supremacy which gave indications of proving as permanent as the seven year itch.

Speaking of the seven year itch brings Nip back into the story just as he is scratching himself behind the ear and sadly contemplating the fact that he has been left out of what looks like a lot of fun. And just at this moment someone hits the puck a mighty whack which sent it clear out of bounds and right under Nip's unsuspecting nose. Such an opportunity to enter the game could hardly be turned down by dog or man, so Nip responded true to a sporting element in his blood and, picking up the puck, started off for precincts unknown . . . this action immediately changing the game into a cross-country run . . . with the advantage distinctly in Nip's favor since skates didn't work very well in snowdrifts.

Most of the fellows thought Nip's making away with the puck a good joke . . . but Buck couldn't see it that way. He called angrily after the fast disappearing black and white spots and finally dashed off his skates, giving spirited chase. A few took up the pursuit with him, among them being Jerry.

When Nip had had his run out he sat down in a snowbank, his tongue hanging out mischievously—the fat stub of his tail wagging playfully—and waited for his pursuers to get up to him. The puck lay in the snow before him and Nip looked up at the towering Buck as much as to say, "I'm done with it now. You can have it."

But Buck was not done with Nip. Before the dog had any warning of his intentions, an angry foot had kicked it in the jaw. With a howl of pain, Nip grovelled in the snow, begging forgiveness for he knew not what. The foot swung with a hollow plunk against his side.

"You will run off with our puck, will you!"

By this time Jerry and the others had arrived. They stood by for just an instant, looking at one another, undecided. It was Jerry who grabbed the enraged Buck by the arm.

"Don't lick him. He's only a dog. He doesn't know any better!"

Buck shook Jerry's hand off and swung his foot back for another kick.

"It's time he knew better . . . I'll teach him!"

Then Jerry did a surprising thing—for him. He grabbed the mighty Buck with both hands and pulled him back so that the kick missed fire. The other fellows looked at Jerry as though they were willing to give him all the moral backing he needed. Nip crawled off a few paces and crouched, shivering, in the snow. Buck turned on Jerry, fist clenched.

"What do you mean, interfering with me?"

Jerry stood his ground, eyes blazing.

"You're not going to beat any dog while I'm around! You'll have to beat me first!"

For the next few seconds it appeared that a clash could not be avoided. But Buck finally thought better of it, stepping back as if he considered Jerry too lightly to trouble with. It was evident, however, that Buck now held Jerry in contempt. There was an open breach between them. Buck shot a glance at Nip who set up a whimpering. Then he turned to the others.

"Come on, guys!"

Buck started back toward the Mill Pond. But he started alone. Those who had stood by now plainly indicated with whom their sympathies lay. Buck stopped in surprise, acted as though he were going to return and have it out, then strode on toward the pond with a lordly swagger. Oh well, if those few fellows didn't approve of his action, they could go hang. He could get along without them.

Jerry ran over to Nip and knelt down, stroking the quivering dog's nose.

"There, there, boy. You're all right now. Get up, sir!"

Nip obeyed the command, shakily, his tail wagging a feeble appreciation. Jerry turned to his small band of supporters who, if the truth were known, had just been waiting to cleave to the first fellow who dared defy Buck.

"What could have come over Buck, jumping on a dog like that?" asked Jerry, defensively. "I didn't mean to cause any hard feelings but I . . . I just couldn't stand it . . . that's all."

"Same here," said Bud Evans, boldly, "If you hadn't called him for it, I would have."

Nip let out a grateful snort. It was nice to know he was among friends.

"I . . . I suppose Buck won't have much use for us any more," spoke up Frank Howard, a stockily built youth.

"Don't care if he hasn't!" snapped Jerry defiantly as he rubbed Nip's nose.

"There'll be others that'll cut loose when they find out," suggested Hal Rader.

And so it was that within the next few days the first rift ever to take place among the fellows of Greentown, came about. Jerry Sawyer suddenly found himself a leader with a following and the complete power which Buck had so arrogantly wielded was now about evenly divided, much to Buck's displeasure.

Nip's allegiance to Jerry was unquestioned. He was given a full-fledged membership in the organization and the title of mascot. The title didn't mean anything to Nip but the membership did. He could sense that he was one of the bunch and he could exhibit just as much dislike at the mention of Buck's name as anyone.

The split brought a feeling of intense rivalry. It was natural that each side should want to prove itself the stronger and thus justify the stand that its followers had taken. A fistic encounter would prove nothing. Superiority must be demonstrated more decisively and in a more

dignified manner. To Jerry it was evident that a blow must be struck at Buck in the place that would hurt him worst . . . and this place was ostensibly his skating vanity. Could Buck's very stronghold be invaded and a defeat registered against it . . . then would the sun lose its place in the heavens and the lowly satellite become a star of the first magnitude!

Curiously enough, Buck was thinking the same thing. But his reasoning was different. It was logical for him to rely upon his strongest forte when considering conquest. And how could the enemy be more thoroughly overwhelmed than in a savage engagement to be fought out upon the ice?

This may or may not prove that great minds run in the same channels but, at any rate, the opposing forces organized for hockey and put in strenuous practice sessions. It got noised about that Buck's supporters had named themselves the Greentown All-Stars whereupon Jerry's followers voted to be called the Greentown Ice Wonders. Villagers buzzed over the suddenly developed rivalry and the crowd around the base burner in Byrl Hedgefellow's general store pulled at their beards and spit tobacco juice more than ever. It looked like a

mighty stiff winter ahead whether the ground hog saw his shadow or not. The Ice Wonders had relinquished the pond to the All-Stars and were working out on a vacant lot which they had flooded. No overtures had been made for a contest between the two factions but it was unofficially rumored that both sides were getting hot under the collar and "rarin' to go."

At this juncture, Byrl Hedgefellows, thinking to help things along, kindly volunteered his services as the neutral party to arrange for a clash between the blustering All-Stars and the broiling Ice Wonders. Hockey was the great winter sport at Greentown. The natives called it shinny, which came nearer to describing it, but young and old understood the game. As the general store keeper had said, "The people in this here town was born with skates on their feet," meaning just as much to him as though they had been born with silver spoons in their mouths—which last saying is too old a chestnut to use now.

Byrl found the All-Stars and Ice Wonders agreeable to the fixing of a date for the contest. Buck wanted to play the game without referees or time-keepers and to play until one side or the other just naturally had to holler quits. But

Jerry wanted to make the game more official, play it the regular three periods of fifteen minutes each with someone to enforce the rules. He wanted to beat Buck fair and square if he beat him at all and he wanted the whole of Greentown to know it.

Whom to pick for referee? That was the question. Most everyone in town was partial to one side or the other. There was a traveling man by the name of Randolph Morris who was making Greentown his headquarters for a number of days. When he heard of the difficulty Byrl was having in making satisfactory arrangements, he offered to fill the hazardous position.

"Does you know anything about the game?" Byrl asked, twisting his chin whiskers and looking the stranger over critically.

"Just a little," replied the traveling man, quietly, "I played on the Boston A. A's when they won the national title."

Byrl gulped in several cubic yards of air and swallowed his surprise as easily as he could.

"Well—that don't mean nothin' around these parts," said the proprietor of the general store, "But I'll talk to the boys and see how they feels about it."

Within the next half hour all Greentown and the surrounding country was plastered by word of mouth with the news that one of the world's greatest hockey players was in the village and was going to referee the big match between the All-Stars and Ice Wonders which was scheduled to take place on the Mill Pond next Saturday afternoon at two o'clock!

Nip, who had now become the willing property of Jerry in particular and his gang in general, (sleeping in the basement of the Sawyer home just out of reach of the Sawyer cat), showed by his actions that he considered the coming battle as good as won.

"Don't you cock up your ears that way yet!" warned Jerry playfully, at the end of a strenuous practice session. "We'd like to wallop Buck for you, old boy, but it's going to be some job. And if we don't . . . this little burg is hardly going to be large enough to hold us all!"

The morning of the game dawned clear and cold. The day might well have been made to order. There was only one thing missing . . . and that was Nip! When Jerry went to the basement door to let Nip up the dog wasn't there. Jerry ran down the basement stairs,

calling Nip's name. No dog. Nip was gone all right. A basement window was open. There were footprints in the dry snow outside and a scraped off place like something had been dragged over the sill. Some ravelings told rather plainly that Nip had been shoved into a gunny sack.

Jerry got in touch with the bunch at once. They held an indignation meeting. It was clearly the work of Buck's forces. If Jerry had figured on hitting Buck where it would hurt the most, Buck had certainly retaliated. To make way with Nip was the hardest blow he could have struck. The fellows were positively sick.

"What'll we do?" asked Jerry, helplessly.

"There's no use hunting for him," said Frank Howard, who was to play goal keeper, "They've got Nip tucked out of sight . . . count on that. And they'd like to know that we're upset about it. Looks like the only thing to do is to pretend that everything's all right."

"Yes . . . but everyone knows . . . when we go out to play and Nip isn't there . . . on the sidelines . . . folks'll begin to . . ." faltered Jerry.

"That's just where we've got to give them the laugh," persisted Frank, "Nip wouldn't

want us to go to pieces just because they've done something to him and . . ."

"I get you!" broke in Hal Rader, excitedly, "They think we won't be able to put up a good fight without Nip. Well, we'll show 'em!"

It was a boiling hot bunch of Ice Wonders who skated out on the Mill Pond hockey rink that afternoon. If there's ever really blood in a person's eyes they had it and lots of it. Everyone in Greentown was on the side-lines . . . except Nip. At least there were six hundred and some people there and if they all didn't come from Greentown it's nobody's fault but their own. They were there . . . that's all that mattered. Business? There was no business. The main street was quieter than a back alley at midnight. Byrl Hedgefellows walked up and down the side of the hockey rink, too nervous to stand still, his mouth opening and shutting on a plug of tobacco which motion kept the chin whiskers bobbing up and down like someone frisking a whisk broom. Byrl didn't care who won but he was all "het up" on general principles.

Referee Morris was the object of all eyes as he called the two captains, Buck and Jerry, together. At either end of the rink goal nets

had been erected under the traveling man's supervision. They consisted of a covered top and sides, six feet in width by four feet high, into which enclosure the puck must be shot in order to score a point. The goals were set out above five feet from the ends of the rink and spaces of twenty feet were marked off as the defending area in front of each goal. There could be no offside in this territory while between these two areas the rink was open and the players had to "shinny on their own side."

Before putting the puck in play, Referee Morris gathered the two teams about him and laid down the law. He said, "Now I've heard some wild yarns about the way you fellows go at each other and I'm here to warn you that this game's going to be played clean. All rough stuff is out. Do you hear me? . . . Out! The best team's going to win . . . not the hardest boiled. So if you've got any bright ideas about tripping or swinging your sticks at anything else but the puck . . . get rid of 'em now . . . because I'm going to call every foul."

This bit of firm-jawed advice did not particularly appeal to Buck who scowled sullenly. Jerry was all smiles . . . a fact which further irritated the leader of the All-Stars. The

crowd broke into a scattered but enthusiastic cheer as the players skated to their positions ready for the start of the game.

As Buck had hoped, Jerry was opposing him at centre. And as Jerry had surmised, Buck began at once to plague him.

"Where's your dog?" he asked, in an undertone, watching Jerry's face closely.

"Dog? . . . What dog?" asked Jerry, putting on a blank front.

Buck laughed as he rested the blade of his stick on the ice and faced Jerry's goal.

"You know what dog I mean all right. Guess maybe you wouldn't like to know where he is, eh? . . . Well, you'll never see that purp again!"

"Play!" called the referee, as he dropped the puck between the sticks of Buck and Jerry. There was a quick swishing of the hockey clubs and all thoughts of dogs jumped out of the two contestants' minds. Buck covered the puck with the blade of his stick and made a quick, twisting turn . . . shooting off down the ice, followed by Jerry who strove desperately to keep pace and to wrest the puck away from him. It was a thrill, seeing these two rivals straining every muscle . . . calling upon every artful

movement at their command in an effort to outdo the other. Hal Rader, at right defense, came racing in to intercept Buck but Buck made a sharp, dodging turn which threw up a fine spray of chipped ice . . . leaving both Rader and Jerry behind. Buck tried to draw the stocky Howard, goal keeper for the Ice Wonders, out from in front of the net, but Howard stood fast —waiting for the shot he knew would come. Buck liked to grandstand. His spectacular dash the length of the rink from centre had the crowd in an uproar. He attempted a straightway goal and the puck skimmed over the ice on a gradual rise, approaching Howard, waist high. The plucky goal keeper stepped in front of it, attempted to catch it with his hand . . . but it struck his arm and rebounded. As he darted after it, Buck—following up—swooped down upon the puck and drove it through the now unguarded opening for the first goal of the game. There was no question about it. Buck had scored through sheer brilliance. It was a richly deserved point. Even the referee could not refrain from slapping Buck on the shoulder as he brought the puck back to centre to put it in play again. The All-Stars had tallied in less

than a minute. The game looked like it would be a rout.

"It's too bad about that dog," mocked Buck, a teasing confidence in his tone.

Jerry made no answer but clutched his stick tighter, eyes on the puck. A nimble move, catching the puck as it struck the ice, sent it skidding toward Bud Evans, at right wing for the Ice Wonders. Bud attempted a goal but the All-Stars goal keeper blocked and passed to the left defense. From then on, all through the period, the puck changed hands constantly—in sensational manner. There were many sudden spills, the cracking of sticks and the hum of clicking skates as first one and then another play got under motion only to come to grief at the very goal. The Ice Wonders were putting up a terrific defense. Their offense was not so strong for they did not have a player with the power of a Buckingham Sylvester Needham. But they did have team work . . . and each one of the six was giving a good account of himself. The first of the three periods ended with the score 1 to 0, in favor of the All-Stars.

"Gosh, this am a game what am!" exclaimed Byrl Hedgefellows, "I swallowed my tobaccer.

It's a good thing my upper set of teeth didn't come loose!" Byrl looked around as if a sudden thought had struck him. "'Funny thing . . . I been a missin' somethin' all the time I been out here. Now where in tarnation do you s'pose Nip is? 'Taint natural fer that dog to pass up anythin' . . ." Byrl turned to those nearest him in the hopes that someone could explain Nip's absence but the second period was under way before he could find out.

Encouraged by their successful stand against the mighty Buck and his cohorts, the Ice Wonders went back into the game with a determination to do even better. After five minutes of the first period had resulted in a deadlock of futilely executed jabs at each other's goal, Jerry got the puck near centre and swept it down the rink to Bud Evans who made a quick, accurate shot . . . sending the puck whizzing into the net for a tie score, one and one. As the teams lined up again at center amid the wild shouts of the spectators, Jerry said, in a low tone to Buck.

"You'll wish you'd never heard tell of that dog before this game's over!"

The only reply was a contemptuous snort . . . and play was resumed. The All-Stars, battling

furiously, finally found another opening and Buck, taking the puck on a relay from his left wing, fairly blazed it into the net past the goal keeper Howard who made a desperate lunge for it. All Stars once more ahead, 2 to 1!

With a minute remaining of the second period, Jerry got the puck on an offside, took it down the rink on a pretty dodging dribble, drew out the goalie—who thought that Jerry was going to pass to his right wing—and plunked the puck in the net to bring the score up to 2 all as the timekeepers called "Time!"

Call it shinny or hockey or anything you like —such a conflict had never been waged on any ice within miles of Greentown. Referee Morris was agreeably surprised and showed it . . . at the skilful display of skating tactics. He talked to townspeople who gathered around him between periods, arousing local pride until buttons almost popped off vests and suspenders tugged at their moorings from the praise that was heaped upon Greentown's young blood by the former national hockey figure.

"Oh, I guess we aint so far behind the times," remarked Byrl Hedgefellows, as he took a chance on another plug of tobacco.

Both sides were desperate when they came on

the ice for the third and last period. The outcome of the game meant more than just a victory . . . with it went a sort of prestige, a gang superiority, a leadership . . . and a something that would be regarded as vindication. Everyone liked to be with the winner and neither side wanted to hear the taunts of "I told you so . . . if you'd stayed with us . . . or come with us . . . now look where you'd have been!"

So it is not surprising that the third period was packed with skate-flashing action. Marvelous stops of pucks headed straight for a goal were made; formations were broken up by sparkling bits of intercepting; zigzag dashes were run from one end of the rink to the other until the players were forced to slow down their pace a trifle, so furious had it become. Thus far the game had been unusually clean, with few penalties. But now, Buck, never having encountered such stiff opposition before, was getting rough . . . and taking chances. It seemed that Jerry was always at his heels, keeping after him just enough to prevent Buck from getting in a position to score.

It was in the last five minutes that Buck, trying to reach the puck on the rebound from a

shot by his right wing, saw Jerry shoot ahead of him, his stick almost upon the puck. It looked like Jerry had a clear field ahead to the All-Star goal. Buck could not get to the puck in time to take it from his rival . . . but he could, by an apparent accidental movement, insert the blade of his stick between Jerry's legs. It was a frantic stab and one of those plays which try the judgment of the most experienced of referees. Jerry went down in a skidding slide, giving a wild-eyed glance at the puck as he went past it. Two flashing strides and Buck had recovered the puck. Jerry, upon his feet, shot a protesting look at the referee for not calling what he knew to be a deliberate foul. The spectators cheered madly as Buck was off like a streak, babying the puck at the tip of his stick and dodging the defensive assaults of his opponents. When within twenty feet of the goal he feinted as if to pass to his right wing, then he actually did pass to the left wing. Howard, goal keeper, covered up and turned toward the new point of danger. But the left wing had no intention of shooting for a goal. His only desire was to draw the goalie out. This he succeeded in doing . . . and then he speedily passed the puck back to Buck who was in a di-

rect position to score and the surest driver on the team. Jerry, tearing down the side of the rink in an effort to overtake Buck . . . and knowing that time was almost up . . . gasped his dismay. Buck's shot for the goal was clean and true . . . the puck sped straight for the net . . .

At that instant a black and white something nosed its way through the crowd fringed behind the goal and loped out upon the rink directly in the path of the speeding puck. The puck, striking a raised portion of ice, bounded off the something's ribs and spun a few feet away.

Byrl Hedgefellows, rubbing a bewildered hand across his eyes, dropped his mouth open in an excited stare.

"Jingo, if there aint Nip!"

The dog, unmindful of the consternation he was causing, pounced playfully upon the puck, picking it up between his teeth as the referee called time out. Jerry, pulling up on his skates, greeted Nip joyfully. Nip was dragging some five feet of dog chain. He laid down on the ice and dropped the puck at Jerry's feet, his mouth panting open in a gleeful grin.

"Well, Buck . . . here's the dog you were talking about," announced Jerry, while the

players swarmed around . . . the Ice Wonders with new life . . . the All-Stars furious . . . stunned.

"He blocked a sure goal!" said Buck, hotly. "It ought to be allowed." He appealed to the referee.

"Nothing doing, young man," was the official reply, "Get that hockey crazy dog off the rink . . . and keep him off! Come on, let's go!"

There was a loud titter of laughter as Jerry skated to the sidelines with Nip trotting along submissively at the end of his claim. He let out one challenging bark as Jerry turned to his enthusiastic team-mates.

"All right, fellows . . . let's eat 'em up! They couldn't hold Nip—and they can't hold us!"

With two minutes to play the Ice Wonders lived up to their name and then some. The rink for that one hundred and twenty seconds, looked like the breeding place of a cyclone. The score was still two to two when play was resumed . . . but the All-Stars appeared dazed . . . and shot to pieces. There was a brief exchange of passes near centre when Jerry came into possession of the puck. He started for the All-Star

goal, evading their left defense by a dodging skid that almost threw him off his feet. In front of him Buck loomed, swinging his stick wickedly. Jerry came straight for him with lightning like speed, then tried a twisting turn. Buck came up short to block him and reached out for the puck but in some unaccountable way he stumbled and fell straight across Jerry's path. A wild cry went up from the spectators. Jerry, seeing this sudden obstacle, gave the puck a quick shove to the side . . . and bending low . . . hurdled the sprawling Buck. It was a daring play . . . the skates just nicking the fallen figure. Jerry alighted in a stumbling glide and raked out his stick for the spinning puck, just getting it away from the right defense who had followed in on the play. The timekeepers bent over their watches. With a last remaining stride, Jerry shot close up to the goal and cut the puck a vicious clip, singeing it past the goal keeper into the net. As he did so his legs crumpled under him and he slid along the ice on his knees. Then the timekeepers shouted "Time!"

Referee Morris helped lift Jerry to his feet as the crowd over-ran the rink.

"Boys," said the referee, stepping back into

his business role of traveling salesman, "You come close to making me feel ashamed of myself. That's about the finest brand of hockey I've ever seen!"

And then Byrl Hedgefellows came in for undying glory on a witticism which he has tried ever after to equal, by speaking what came to his mind in that moment of hilarious relaxation following the game, "You're right, stranger, she was Nip and puck all the way!"

REEDER, LEFT DEFENSE

ZERO weather to Cranton meant a number of things—some pleasant and some unpleasant. It meant quite obviously that more smoke went up chimneys and more clothes went on people's backs and more icicles went on the eves of houses. It meant, more particularly, that the bay was sure to freeze and that, with the freezing of the bay, Cranton's great winter sport—ice hockey—would begin!

To Norman Reeder, youth of seventeen summers, the steam rising off the shivering surface of the bay this coldest of cold mornings was a blood-warming spectacle. He had more than ordinary reason for being overjoyed at the prospects of the bay freezing over. Such a happening would permit him the long awaited opportunity to atone for his conduct in that unforgettable last season's clash with Malden . . . and also the opportunity to even up some old

scores. Curse Malden! Her team members had been tricky enough to aim at his hair-trigger temper . . . they had deliberately fouled to upset him, to get him off his game, to force him out of play . . . and then they had carried the rest of the Cranton High team off their feet in a rushing last period attack, scoring two goals for an unmerited 2 to 1 victory. Unmerited because Cranton had been leading up until then—leading on a goal made by Norman in the first five minutes of play—and, had it not been for Malden's having riled him, Norman knew that his team would never have gone to pieces. It was disconcerting to have the star player fly off the handle . . . and that's what Norman had done. But he had been justified in so doing. Every one of his team-mates agreed as to that. And this made the defeat easier to bear. If he'd just lost his temper over practically nothing at all . . . then he'd have felt more directly to blame. Goodness knows—a loss to Malden was the toughest kind of a pill for Cranton to swallow under any circumstances!

Malden! The very name was gall and wormwood to anyone who lived in Cranton. Malden —that little town which crouched on the shores

of Tawas Bay—just fourteen miles away. Early settlers would tell you chilling tales of almost unbelievable rivalry . . . rivalry in everything. Malden had the best athletes, the best looking girls, the best cornhuskers, the best horseshoe pitchers, the best town hall, the best volunteer fire department, the best fishermen, the best this and the best that ad infinitum and back again. Of course Cranton never admitted that Malden had the best anything and each town had tried through the years to definitely establish supremacy. If the truth were actually told, it would seem that Cranton had always displayed a better sense of sportsmanship when feeling was running high. There were a few in Malden who, on occasion, had resorted to rowdy-like tactics to win a point. Cranton had never done telling of the time, years ago, when a Cranton football team had gone to Malden and all but annihilated the Malden eleven to the tune of 55 to 0. In retaliation, so the story went, the Cranton team members were captured after the game and forced to eat a supper of raw fish. If you were in Malden and related this story, you would hear another one to balance it . . . of how a Malden hockey team, years past, had journeyed to Cranton and—after having de-

feated the home town boys—was taken out and dipped in the ice-gripped waters of the bay.

One is thus able to understand how "young bloods" growing up in either Malden or Cranton accepted, as a part of their schooling, the information that either one or the other of these towns was a spot on the map that existed for the purpose of causing as much trouble as possible. One student is even said to have listed Malden and Cranton as two sites where the most important battles of the civil war were fought. Of course he got "D" on his report card for this answer but there is little doubt that he had found the strife around him far more real than that which he had read about in books.

This winter season, both Cranton and Malden had been aroused to the fever height of anticipation through the putting up of a handsome silver cup by Carrington Randhurst, notorious sportsman who had vacationed the past three summers on a point midway between the two towns. The cup was to be the permanent possession of the team which should triumph in hockey . . . and of all athletic combats . . . the ice conflicts had been the most bitterly contended.

"Go to it, boys!" Mr. Randhurst had urged

at a baseball contest between the Cranton Bull Dogs and the Malden Wild Cats, "Sic 'em, Cranton! Claw 'em, Malden! And may the best team win!"

It was the genial sportsman's intention to return to Cranton, where the match was to be played . . . and to witness the hockey encounter. He had heard so much of last season's thrilling battle when Malden had won out in the last five minutes of play after Norman Reeder, Cranton's star left wing, had been put out of the game for slugging. There had been wild scenes after this famous clash . . . near fights between those who had sought to defend Reeder for his apparently unsportsmanlike conduct . . . and those, in greater majority, who had seen no excuse for the outbreak. But—in that moment of intense agitation, there were few on either side really qualified to pass clear judgment.

And now, the fellow who had been responsible for the outburst of town feeling as well as Malden's fortunate victory . . . having reviewed the entire situation in his mind . . . shook his fist eagerly at the cold, lifeless water.

"Come on. Hurry it up! You can't freeze any too soon to suit me! We've been practicing

a whole month on the ice rink already. What do you mean holding off this long?

There was not even a ripple of laughter from the bay in answer to this. It was too far gone. A jacket of ice was fastening itself over its surface. Two more days like today and no open water would be visible. By the end of the week Cranton hockey enthusiasts would be marking off a rink . . . and school officials of Cranton and Malden would be making overtures to each other regarding the fixing of a date for the annual battle.

Confidence as to the outcome of this season's clash was running high in Malden. Truth of the matter was, Malden had a big surprise up her sleeve for Cranton. And Malden was taking great care that the surprise did not leak out until the last minute. The surprise was contained in the person of Eldred Kent. It had taken some persuasion for Judge Ingerson to get the Kent family to move to Malden. But the judge had known well how to play up the advantages of his community, especially when there was so much at stake—for the Kents were parents of a most unusual boy . . . a boy whom the judge described as being the "fastest thing on skates he had ever seen." Malden

therefore had seen to it that Eldred Kent's father got plenty of work to do in his profession as shoe cobbler. In return for the town's help, the son was to perform on the hockey team —which arrangement pleased all concerned highly.

Eldred Kent was a powerfully built youth who possessed the faculty of combining size and speed. He had always been large for his age. In fact, when Judge Ingerson had run onto him the past winter in Novak City, he had found young Kent holding down a position as wing on a men's hockey team. Yet the boy was only in his second year of highschool which made him perfectly eligible to take up studies at Malden High and add his strength to their team.

"With him in the line-up it'll be a walk-away for Malden this year," prophesied Judge Ingerson, gleefully, "He's got everything. I never saw his equal. Wait till you see him dribble the length of the rink . . . and use his fake shot and fake pass. Say, he'll go through the Cranton defense as thought it isn't there at all. Why the men's teams couldn't even stop him. He can rough it with the best of 'em, too. They won't put anything over on Eldred Kent. He's wise to every trick of the game. And just maybe

he won't make that Norman Reeder look sick!"

When Cranton first heard of Eldred Kent it was just two days before the date set for the big contest. Cranton might not have heard then except for the fact that Doctor Henry Badger had been called to Malden on a consultation case and had made good use of the opportunity to glimpse the Malden hockey team in a workout.

"Who's that new fellow you've got this year?" the doctor had inquired, after watching Kent take the puck through the opposing scrub team in a blinding dash down the rink.

And a proud bystander had unburdened the entire story, not recognizing that he was pouring it into the ears of an arch enemy . . . for the doctor, years before, had competed against Malden . . . his whole spirit rising up again as he learned to the extent Malden had gone to insure victory in what would undoubtedly prove one of the most important clashes since the intense rivalry of the two towns had begun.

"Make no mistake," the doctor reported to Coach Stanley Warren on his return to Cranton, "This fellow Eldred Kent is greased lightning. It will take our best to chain him . . . and then some. I don't know of a skater we have who can come close to comparing with

him . . . except, of course . . . young Reeder. Even Reeder would more than have his hands full. It's my opinion that you'll have to work out a special system of defense to cope with this fellow if you hope to have a chance against Malden this year!"

Impressed by the doctor's report, Coach Warren made a hurried trip to Malden for the purpose of looking over the Malden team. He caught the squad in its next to the last practice session. It seemed that almost the entire town of Malden was out to witness its hockey warriors go through their final scrimmage. The following day, it was explained, a light drill of signal practice and play formations would be held . . . at which time none but the team members would be permitted on the rink. How earnestly Malden was taking to her task this year!

Coach Warren, like Doctor Badger, came back to Cranton sober-faced and gloomy. Prospects looked dark for Cranton . . . exceedingly dark. Eldred Kent was every bit as good as he had been touted. And, to get the full value from his services, Malden had craftily built her plays around him. But this was far from indicating that Malden had a one man team. It was simply

that one man—by his great amount of talent—stood out on a team which, without him, would have rated as the equal of average Malden teams!

Coach Warren sat up most of that night—thinking—and the next morning he came down to the rink with a plan . . . a plan to stop Eldred Kent. The coach was not at all sure that the Malden star could be stopped, but he realized the necessity of taking desperate measures if Cranton was to maintain the slightest possible hope for victory. Tersely the coach told his players of the "ringer" that Malden had run in on their team and of his outstanding ability. Then he came straight to the point.

"With Kent out of the line-up we stand an even chance of defeating Malden. But figuring Kent in, we don't stand a chance in the world unless he can be stopped . . . and stopped practically dead. I wish you fellows could have seen him in action before you are forced to play him but Malden has covered him up well. They intend to spring him as a grand surprise. And I'm hoping that we can hand Malden a grand surprise in return . . . a defense that Kent can't break through!"

The Cranton team sat, respectfully silent,

clustered about the red hot sides of the old base burner in the Community Bath House which each winter became the dressing room for the school's hockey players. The building was situated on the shore line, now a fringe of ice and snow—directly opposite the rink, some several hundred yards out.

"My plan for meeting Kent's style of play is to shift some of you players around," continued the coach, as team members eyed him curiously. "For instance, instead of putting Reeder in at wing, I'm going to play him at left defense and pit him against Kent who is to play right wing."

There was as excited stir among the team members with heads inclined toward Norman Reeder, captain, to see how he would take this unexpected announcement. An expression of surprise crossed Norman's face; he parted his lips as though to speak, then checked himself and sat, scowling.

"Norman is the fastest skater and the most experienced player. I'm handing him the tough assignment of sticking to this Malden whirlwind no matter what happens. That's all he'll have to do and believe me, that'll be plenty! But if Reeder can do this successfully—and keep Kent

from running amuck on the scoring end—we ought to give Malden a terrific fight. I'm shifting Morrow to Reeder's former position at left wing; this leaves Hallberg at right wing; Kelly at center; Packard at right defense, and Wells as goal keeper."

For a good moment after the coach had finished there was not a move or sound made by any member of the squad. Each fellow was quietly contemplating the changes. Then Norman Reeder stood to his feet, face flushed, with a little conscious clearing of his throat.

"If you please, sir . . . not wanting to go against your judgment . . . but don't you think I would be better in my old place? It's the only position I've ever played . . . I'm not much on defense . . . really . . . If I've got any knack it's in shooting for the goal . . ."

Coach Warren's jaw tightened.

"I rather expected you to protest, Norman. But then again I thought you might be willing to do anything that seemed best for the chance of beating Malden . . . especially after what happened last year . . ."

The Cranton captain hung his head sheepishly.

". . . the fact that you've never played a defensive position is no indication that you would not be good in one. At any rate I've a hunch that you might prove a sensation. Of course, what you might make of the opportunity would be entirely up to you. You've never seen this fellow Kent play. *I have.* And let me tell you, if you're entertaining any ideas that you could outscore him, man to man, you'd better drop them right now. If you won't take my word for it I prophesy that before the game is five minutes old . . . you'll wonder how a cyclone could have hit so many places at once. He's a whiz . . . and the only logical thing to do, as I see it, is to put the best flash we have on his heels. That's *you.* How about it? Are you game?"

Norman's head came up. His face was still flushed. It was easy to discern that the switch from wing to defense had hurt. The Cranton captain had been dreaming for weeks of tearing up the rink himself; of breaking loose like a wild man, ripping through the Malden team for dazzling goal shots. And now he was being shifted to a position where his scoring possibilities would be nil; forced to trail the opposing star instead of competing against him.

Coach Warren was deliberately handcuffing the man who, in the past, had proven the team's biggest scoring factor! More than that, this change absolutely ruined Norman's plan for revenge. He would have had to have defeated Malden almost single-handed this year to have paid them back for last season's bitter defeat. Oh, well . . . if the coach wanted to throw the game away, nobody could blame him . . .

"All right—I'll play left defense, agreed Norman, grudgingly. "But I won't promise how good . . ."

Coach Warren smiled. He seemed unimpressed by Norman's obvious reluctance.

"Fine! We'll go out on the rink now and I'll try to give you an idea of Kent's style of play. We'll just run through a light scrimmage, fellows. I know that may sound foolish with the game tomorrow . . . but this eleventh-hour shift makes it absolutely necessary!"

It was a cold, cloudless day that the weather man presented to the citizens of Cranton and Malden on the date for the long anticipated hockey battle. Early in the morning of this day, Malden inhabitants busied themselves getting ready for the move to Cranton. By noon there

was hardly a soul left in the little town, due to the practically one hundred per cent migration. Cranton, on the other hand, had doubled herself in population. Doc Badger, in viewing the jostling crowd from his office window, remarked that the stage had never been more perfectly set for a massacre. "Malden will just naturally tear up the town if they win today!" ruminated the doctor. "They know they've got a powerful team and they all want to be in on the slaughter. That's why it's the time of times for us to win. I'd give up half my practice to see *our* boys make the killing!"

All Cranton felt the same way about it. Every man, woman and child was behind the team to the limit. It was a personal affair with all of them and feeling mounted to an even higher pitch when Malden enthusiasts, before the game, made open sport of Cranton's chances for victory.

"Ho, ho! It's going to be a walk-away this year!" one Maldenite boasted.

"Nothing to it!" flaunted another. "We're going to tie your team up into nice little bow knots! They'll be lucky to get their sticks anywhere near the puck. Walk-away? Why, it's going to be a run-away!"

To these sallies Cranton made but the weakest sort of answer, although, underneath, each Crantonite was seething. Truth was, news had traveled about that Coach Warren was holding Malden in fearsome respect . . . that Malden *did* have a team of unusual strength . . . and now—with Malden's quite evident super confidence—Cranton felt just a bit squelched . . . helplessly so. Cranton would reserve her burst of verbal opposition for the game when it would be possible to judge just how superior Malden might prove to be . . . if superior at all. Thus it was that, up to game time, Malden ruled its rival town with the gloating arrogance of a mighty conqueror . . . while Cranton squirmed under Malden's heel just enough to let the heel know that it was far from crushing out Cranton hopes of victory.

Carrington Randhurst had arrived that morning. He spent the few hours before the game visiting both camps, where he was very much the object of interest. The sportsman extended his cordial good wishes to each side . . . in fact, one would think to hear him encourage Cranton that his sympathies were entirely with Cranton . . . but to follow him to the Malden camp and listen to another expression of sym-

pathy would convince one that a leopard can certainly change its spots . . . and do it speedily! Mr. Randhurst was having the time of his life and he didn't care who knew it. A holiday spirit was in the air. Not an ordinary holiday either. It wasn't the kind where folks felt inspired to throw confetti. Daggers would have been more in order.

On a slight little folding table, just off the center of the rink, Carrington Randhurst caused the magnificent silver cup to be placed, in plain sight of the admiring hundreds as well as the victory-yearning eyes of the contestants. The cup stood a good two feet high and was topped with two silver figures of hockey players facing each other, sticks raised for action. A prize well worth the striving for . . . a prize which served to quicken the blood of Cranton and Malden much as the lash of a whip or a spur to a horse.

Norman Reeder viewed the cup hungrily as he skated past in a flash down the rink preliminary to the game while the crowd roared madly. The whole Cranton team had been worked up to a frenzy . . . each player was figuratively on the toes of his skates . . . waiting for time to be called. A high nervous tension prevailed.

Malden, on the other hand, was calm . . . cool . . . collected . . . Malden was conscious of her strength . . . this clash would not be a test to her . . . it would just be an opportunity to overwhelm. The cup? Wrap it up right now, please . . . ready for delivery!

A hum of excitement buzzed around the rink when the two teams skated to their places and Reeder was seen to go to left defense opposite the great Eldred Kent at right wing for Malden.

"What's this?" folks asked themselves, unbelievingly.

"A ruse!" guessed Malden, and laughed her derision.

The great Kent shook hands with Reeder in a condescending manner.

"Well, well!" he said. "So they've put *you* in against me? I was told it would be a chap named Morrow. Of course, it's all the same to me."

Norman could feel the blood tingling to the roots of his hair. He bit his teeth to keep from making a burning reply. It was enough to be shifted about . . . let alone being joshed at the very start by his opponent. So, the much-touted Kent didn't think he amounted to any

more than Morrow, eh? He'd show him. Just let him get his stick on the puck!

Whistle!

A mad cheer from the crowd; a swishing of sticks in the center position; the puck whizzing straight at Norman . . . and Kent!

Norman skimmed in front of Kent, jabbed out his stick, stopped the puck and swung about to make toward his goal. Packard, at right defense, came shooting past.

"To me! To me!" he yelled, raking out his stick.

But Norman, babying the puck at the end of his club, started down the ice on a dribble.

It happened so suddenly that Norman was hardly conscious that the puck had been battered out of his possession until a second afterward. A streak of blue lightning swirled up from behind, came alongside, struck out with blinding force, crashed against his stick and flashed away again. Norman brought up on his skates ten feet further on with the crowd yelling hoarsely . . . to turn about and see a speeding figure making toward the Cranton goal . . . dodging . . . passing . . . faking a shot and then spinning the puck past Wells, the goalie,

after drawing Cranton's last defensive obstacle out of position on a beautifully timed false motion.

Score: Malden, 1; Cranton, 0. First minute of play!

"Why didn't you pass to me?" demanded Packard, hotly, as the team lined up for action again.

"I—I thought I had a clear field," answered Norman.

Packard slapped his fellow player on the back, entreatingly.

"You *watch* Kent!" he begged. "Never mind the clear fields. Just see that *he* doesn't get any!"

Norman glowered.

"Say, I guess I know what I'm . . ." he started to retort, but play was on once more. Cranton a goal behind; Malden crazy with joy . . . applauding their star, Kent; deriding the man who was supposed to be guarding him . . . Well, the game was far from over yet! Just give him another chance at the puck!

A mix-up across the rink . . . and Packard coming out of the mix-up with the puck. A scorching shot across to him. Norman glanced back over his shoulder, reaching out his stick

to intercept the puck. Kent was a good fifteen feet from him. A lead of fifteen feet . . . the Malden defence pulled a bit to the other side of the rink . . . a wonderful opportunity for a flash of individual work such as he had shown in his old position at left wing!

Norman swept past the center of the rink with Kelly, Cranton center, falling in beside him as a sort of interference. The Malden right defense loomed up in front. Norman faked a pass to Kelly, swerved toward the edge of the rink and swung around the opposition, his skates sending up a shower of chipped ice. He turned in abruptly to get a better angle for a shot at the goal. The Malden goal keeper, a heavy-set youth, crouched facing the oncoming threat. Kelly, racing up on the other side, cried to Norman:

"Over here! Let me have it!"

It would have been the proper thing to have done—a quick, unexpected pass to Kelly . . . for Kelly was on the unprotected side of the goalie . . . in position to make a short, snappy jab at the goal. But Norman had eyes only for the goal himself. *He* wanted to be the one to score. Kent was not going to make *him* look foolish. He could go the length of the rink, too

. . . Norman lashed the puck savagely. It raised off the ice on a stinging line toward the goal.

The goal tender braced, bringing his padded legs together. The puck struck his left knee and bounded a few feet away. Malden cheered. Cranton groaned. But Kelly, nearby, making a sweeping lunge for the puck, managed to catch it on the end of his stick. He flashed the puck through the small opening left by the goalie before the goal tender could recover sufficiently to prevent the shot. Cranton's groan changed into a mighty roar of joy.

Score: Malden, 1; Cranton, 1. Four minutes of the first period gone!

"Yea, Kelly! Yea, Kelly! Yea, Kelly!" yelled the Crantonites.

"Yea, Kelly!" scoffed Norman, bitterly, as he skated back up the rink. "What would Kelly have done if it hadn't been for me?"

"Some luck on that one!" challenged Kent, laughingly, as Norman took up his position at left defense.

"What do you mean—luck?" blazed Norman, chagrined that he had not been the one to score.

"Just what I said!" taunted Kent, with a

wink at his right wing. "You couldn't get away with that again in a thousand years!"

It was evident that the Malden star had been informed of Reeder's weakness.

"Is that so?" countered Norman. "Just where did you get the idea that you were so good?"

"From watching you play!" rejoined the great Kent.

That was the red rag in front of the bull for Norman. Gone was whatever resolve he had made to keep his head. Gone were all thoughts of Cranton as a team. There raged within Norman only the desire to annihilate the Malden star. It was a personal matter from now on. This was just what the coach had wanted anyhow. It was foolishness expecting him to guard Kent. There was no use in guarding a fellow if you could get the puck and run away with it yourself. Let Kent try to guard him! The best defense was a good offense. Look how he—Norman—had demoralized the whole Malden team on his dash down the rink for the score that Kelly had made! He would play just as he had planned . . . It didn't matter what position he'd been put on the team.

Malden couldn't stop him. Luck? Kent didn't have any license to make any cracks about luck. If Kent hadn't gotten the puck away from him on his first rush for the Malden goal . . . gotten it away on a lucky fluke . . . the score would have been 2 to 0 in favor of Cranton instead of 1 to 1!

For the balance of the first period, Norman threw himself into the play with a wild abandon. He paid little heed to Kent, following doggedly after the puck wherever it went. Every time Norman secured it, he would strike out toward the Malden goal in determined fashion but his advance was now no bed of roses. The way was all thorns. It seemed that the whole Malden team was swarming about him at all times . . . and so it was . . . for Norman, even though he had been pitted against Kent in the position of left defense . . . had been a marked man. Malden figured, from Norman's strange antics, that Cranton had played him in a defensive position in an effort to make Malden think that her star player was going to sacrifice his scoring ability.

"Get Reeder!" shouted the Malden rooters time and again.

Even Coach Warren, though he did not ap-

prove of Norman's tactics, was forced to smile at the strategy which Malden thought she had discovered. He could tell that the great Kent himself was momentarily affected by Norman's apparent disregard. It was a new sensation for Kent to be left uncovered . . . as if he were not considered dangerous. Several times, however, when Kent did get his stick on the puck, he was never headed until he had flashed a try at goal . . . but the exceptional defensive work of Wells had saved Cranton on these occasions . . . the plucky goal tender refusing to be drawn out and making marvelous stops.

Just before the whistle sounded for the end of the first period, Norman—getting the puck on a tip-off from Kelly at center, raced down the rink and made a spectacular shot toward the goal. The puck skidded along the ice, struck the skate of the Malden goalie and caromed off, jumping into the cage for the point which sent Cranton into the lead, 2 to 1!

Assorted pandemonium broke loose. Norman, who a few moments before had been warmly criticized by spectators and even some of his own players, was now cheered to the echo. It was all right, playing the whole game yourself, if you could get away with it. Certainly none

of the other Cranton team members had shown anything on the attack. Reeder had carried the brunt of everything. He had proven the enigma instead of Kent. Malden's highly advertised steam roller had been thrown into reverse by the frenzied playing of Cranton's left defense.

"Cranton sure pulled a slicker putting Reeder in at guard!" opined Malden fans, glumly. "Wonder what was ailing Kent? He didn't look so good."

There was nothing that Coach Warren could say to Norman during the ten minutes' rest and Norman knew it. He had taken things into his own hands and he had justified his action by coming through. Let his team-mates beef about his not passing to them. Guess at that, they wouldn't beef much now. Not when they had him to thank for both their scores . . . and the fact that Malden's big threat hadn't materialized.

"I told you I wasn't much on defense," Norman managed to say to Coach Warren, as the players crouched in sweater coats and heavy blankets some yards away from the rink. "What made you think this fellow Kent was so hot?"

"The game's not over yet," was all that the coach would say. "You fellows have been fortunate enough to get the jump on Malden. Now hold it! Cover every man . . . and keep him covered. Don't let Malden get so much as one clean shot at the goal!"

Back into the ice fray Cranton went, encouraged by the one goal lead. The home hopes were met by the smarting Malden six and a particularly disgruntled Eldred Kent. A part of his reputation had been rubbed off in the first fifteen minutes of play and he was more than anxious to get it back.

"Look out this time!" he warned, as he and Norman stood, awaiting the whistle.

"Look out yourself!" laughed Norman, confidently. "We're just nicely getting started."

But Cranton stopped very shortly. Malden, refusing to be bluffed further by Reeder's playing at left defense, leaped to the attack with a bewildering exhibition of stick work. For five minutes the play was stunningly fast with the puck shooting from one side and corner of the rink to the other. There were a number of bad spills . . . flashing skates and tumbling skaters. Twice the puck was clouted out of bounds and brought back and put in play. Thrown strictly

on the defensive, Cranton began to battle to hold her one goal lead as Coach Warren had directed. But more and more it became apparent that Malden was not to be denied. Malden was getting under way now with sure stroking power . . . and the great Kent was observed to be dominating the play. Several times he brought mad cheers from the crowd by his sensational dashes or seemingly impossible recoveries of the puck. And as for Reeder—who but the period before had commanded Malden's respect—he was now reduced to naught but a puck chaser . . . bringing up the rear of Kent's advances into Cranton territory . . . ineffectually trying to break up Malden plays and thus gain possession of the puck again. Quite obviously, so long as Norman could not get the puck, he could not star. And, as this fact began to eat itself into his consciousness, Norman began to blame his fellow team-mates for the sudden turning in the tide of battle.

Kent scored finally on a difficult side shot which just eluded the hard fighting Wells.

Score: Malden, 2; Cranton, 2.

Norman, as captain, called time out to read his idea of a riot act to the team.

"See here, fellows! What you slowing up

for? We were going great guns the first period. Come on . . . let's get hold of that puck and do something with it. Get the puck and get it to me . . . I'll do the rest!"

Cranton did . . . but Norman didn't! Kelly to Morrow to Reeder . . . and Norman had the puck. The Cranton supporters cheered hopefully . . . then subsided into disappointed silence. Norman had been overtaken by the great Kent . . . and this meant, the way Kent was playing now . . . that the puck was his. Deliberately Kent defied Norman's most furious efforts to get the puck back. Here it was that Norman found his opponent to be a master handler of the stick . . . and one of the trickiest players he had ever encountered. It had not dawned on Norman how clever Kent actually was until now. He had been so concerned with his own playing . . . his own ambition . . . but now that he wanted to recover the puck more than at any other time . . . he knew that Kent was making laughing stock of him. Twice, Norman was sure Kent had passed the puck and relinquished his attempts to follow up . . . only to see the Malden star strike out with a new burst of speed . . . the puck riding along tantalizingly at the end of his stick.

Twice, to show how much in contempt he held the entire Cranton team, Kent circled the rink . . . dodging . . . faking passes and shots at the cage . . . drawing the defense to one side and the other . . . and never once surrendering the puck! Tagging always, at his clicking heels was the desperate and the deeply humiliated Norman. The spectators broke into howls of hilarity. Such a startling display of individual supremacy had never been witnessed in the region about Cranton.

Unable to thwart the great Kent, Norman suddenly saw bright red. The Malden star had now decided that he had played lion and the mouse long enough. He started on a zig-zag course for the Cranton goal. Cutting in close, just as it appeared that Kent was to take a shot at the cage, Norman clipped the Malden star's feet out from under him. Kent took a headlong dive and slid along the ice a good twenty feet. The referee's whistle screeched. He came racing up to Norman as the air rang with a round of strenuous protest.

"Take five minutes in the timer's box to think that one over!" ordered the referee, harshly. "I should put you out for the rest of the game!"

Team-mates helped the shaken Kent to his

feet. He took the foul play good-naturedly. Mortified beyond words, Norman skated to the sidelines, head down, bitterly berating himself. Coach Warren tossed his star a blanket without looking at him. Cranton substitutes glared their reproval.

"Sore head!" bellowed Cranton rooters.

Malden considerately withheld outward comment. The referee's whistle put the puck back in play as Norman sank down upon the ice, pulling the blanket over his head. He did not care to see what was happening out on the rink. There was a bigger battle going on within himself. What was it that had caused him—Norman Reeder—to deliberately foul Kent? He had been guilty of losing his temper in clashes before . . . but there had always been too much of the good sportsman within him to prevent a malicious infraction of the rules. Oh, this was worse than disgraceful! He would never live this down. Never!

A maddened shriek from Malden throats. Norman lifted his blanket. The great Kent had just scored again . . . Cranton trying to carry on with five men now against Malden's six . . . due to the penalty imposed upon Norman. The Cranton captain bowed his head . . . and tears

dripped upon the ice. He knew the trouble now. It was *conceit!* He had always wanted to be the big dog or none. The moment his superiority was challenged he always blew up with a show of temper. It had happened time and again. He had not wanted to defeat Malden so much as he had wanted to star. And that went for the last year, too . . . when Malden was riding him . . . ragging him . . . roughing him. CONCEIT! Get the puck to me and I'll do the rest! He'd done the rest, all right. And done it up brown. Out there his team-mates, with no thoughts of stardom, were playing their hearts out to win . . . while he, their captain . . . ! Norman stretched out at full length on the ice and moaned aloud.

"What's the matter—hurt?" asked a substitute, coldly.

"Shut up!" snapped Norman.

The second period ended, Malden leading, 3 to 2.

A weary bunch of Crantonites skated to the sidelines to be buried in blankets and hastened a fair distance away. Their captain did not accompany them, nor was he invited.

"Get ready for your run-away victory!" sang a prophetic Malden fan who had been

given little to boast about until the last few minutes. "We're going to do everything but murder you this final period!"

Norman's five minute penalty was up with the starting of the third and final period, but he knew instinctively that he would not be sent back into play. It was all over so far as he was concerned. He had been given his chance. Now he was forced to listen to the lusty cheers being given for Saunders, going in to substitute for him. Saunders, a fellow he could play rings around!

"All right, Saundy . . . let's see you stop Kent. You can do it, boy!" called an optimistic Cranton fan. But he turned sidewise to wink hopelessly at a bystander and to add in a low voice, "Maybe—if he had half a dozen arms and legs!"

Norman tossed aside the blanket and sat up, eyes intent on the game, hands clenched. He saw the referee drop the puck between the two centers; saw the blades of their sticks flash; saw the puck shoot out toward the alert Kent. He saw Saunders, fresh and determined, lunge for the puck and get it. He heard the gasping applause of the crowd as the player, substituting for him, started off down the ice pursued by the

Malden star. It was when Saunders attempted to pass to Kelly that Kent, by a brilliant bit of stickwork, blocked the skimming puck . . . spun around in his tracks . . . and made off down the rink with most of the Cranton team dashing frantically after him. Norman, watching, could not help but admire Kent's wonderful mastery . . . and yet there was aroused within him a desire to clash with this powerful adversary again . . . to try to do just what Coach Warren had wanted him to do . . .

Malden came dangerously near to scoring but for a remarkable stop by Wells, Cranton goal keeper, who slid his body in front of a vicious drive headed straight for the cage—waist high—by Kent. Wells followed the puck, hitting it into a corner and holding it against the side boards until he found an opportunity of passing safely to a team-mate.

Norman could not stand it any longer. He leaped to his feet and forced his way through the crowd to Coach Warren.

"Please, Coach . . . I've learned my lesson," he begged. "Let me go back in. I'll stop Kent this time or die trying! I know I don't deserve it . . . but . . ."

Coach Warren turned his back and moved away, unheeding.

"You'll stop Kent? Ha! Ha! Ha! That's a good one!" laughed a Malden rooter who had overheard Norman's entreaty.

Again the flash of red. Norman turned upon the josher as though he would attack him . . . but even as he turned a something gave him a grip on himself. From the rink came a clashing of sticks, then the sound of two bodies coming together and a skidding crash. Time out! Kelly down with a badly sprained knee. Five of the last fifteen minutes gone. Bandages! No, Kelly couldn't stand upright. He was out . . . out of the game . . . being taken to the side-lines. Coach Warren beckoning to another substitute . . .

In that moment the Cranton captain became a savage. He found himself gripping the Coach's shoulder in deadly earnest . . . refusing to be pushed away . . . begging . . . crying . . . demanding . . .

"You've got to let me go back in. You've got to! You think I'm not any different, don't you? Well, I am! I'll show you! Please, Coach . . . ! Just give me . . ."

And substitute Penrod went in for Kelly!

The next five minutes were agony of the most torturous kind. Cranton was fighting desperately . . . putting up a better battle with her star out of the line-up than she had with him. This was because Cranton was placing more reliance upon team work. And then—Wells! How his name would go down in history! Time after time, in some sort of heroic fashion, Wells had managed to repulse the great Kent on repeated attempts to score after Kent had succeeded in outwitting the entire Cranton team. But Wells was fast tiring. He had been the whole defense . . . making seemingly impossible stops and raking the puck away from the cage . . .

With five minutes more to play Malden suddenly awoke to the fact that she was not winning a run-away victory. The score was still alarmingly close—3 to 2. Cranton had been kept strictly on the defense. Perhaps a change of tactics would turn the trick. Craftily Kent captured the puck and skated back behind his own goal line. Cranton, hesitating, waited for him to come out . . . but Kent continued to play with the puck. It was a challenge for Cranton to come and get it. Cranton would have to

take the offensive now if she hoped to do anything at all.

With a rush the two Cranton defensive players made for Kent. As soon as they did so, Kent slashed the puck wickedly from behind his goal line, sending it whizzing up the rink to the Malden left wing. It was a dazzling drive and took the Cranton team off guard. The left wing took an angle shot at the Cranton goal. The Malden supporters gave a wild cheer as the puck raced across the ice . . . but Wells, making a frantic dive, deflected the puck with an outstretched hand . . . then pitched forward on his face. Packard, Cranton right defense, pounced upon the puck and dribbled it out of danger. Time was called.

Wells was taken from the game protesting . . . as the crowd gave him a mighty round of applause.

And then Coach Warren waved to Norman.

The Cranton captain went in opposite the great Kent again while Penrod dropped back to take Wells' place as goalie, and Saunders shifted over to center. A patched up team.

"Hello!" greeted Kent, smilingly. "You back? Well, Cranton must be hard up!"

Norman made no answer. From the side-

lines a few of the spectators were booing him. It was what one had to expect from a certain faction in either Cranton or Malden. But this time, Norman admitted to himself, he deserved the razzing. He was mad clean through . . . mad at himself . . . mad at what he had done . . . and, so long as he could stay mad at himself . . . Norman knew he was all right!

Malden, now that Wells had been removed, resumed play with new dash and confidence. An inexperienced man in the goal tender's position would be pie for them. Perhaps, in the few remaining minutes, Malden could run up the score . . . and make Cranton smart under an overwhelming defeat. Malden players cast covetous eyes at the shining silver cup and imagined their names emblazoned thereon.

Cranton, even though both her scores had been made while Norman was in the game, did not seem encouraged by his return. Reliance had been shifted upon Wells . . . most of Cranton's efforts having been centered on keeping Malden from widening the breach of a single point. Norman now meant just another player to them.

The puck came into Kent's possession. He found himself at once beset by a raging whirl-

wind. Skillfully Kent maneuvered, keeping the puck out of Norman's reach while the crowd yelled. Norman was trying too hard . . . overplaying . . . and Kent was coolly thwarting the frantic efforts to get the puck away from him.

Suddenly Kent made a deliberate and an astonishing move. He evaded the Cranton captain on a scraping mix-up, then turned about and waited for Norman to catch up to him.

"Here—you want it?" the great Kent offered.

In stunned surprise, Norman saw the puck come dancing toward him. He reached out his stick for it as the rink became a riot of sound. Norman wheeled about to shoot, but before he could get rid of the puck it was snatched away from him again and the great Kent went sweeping down the rink, dribbling it, looking back over his shoulder with a beckoning grin.

The supreme self-confidence of the fellow! Four minutes of play remaining; Malden one point to the good; facing his most outstanding opponent . . . and he had surrendered the puck to him . . . certain in his ability to recover it!

Now Kent was going to score. He had dilly-

dallied long enough. As he approached the goal he faked a shot at the cage. Oh, for goal tender Wells! Penrod lurched to the side, wild-eyed. Then Kent drew back his stick for a shot on the opposite side, Penrod being off balance . . . the cage uncovered.

But just at that moment a figure, racing with express train speed, came tearing up from behind . . . flashed in front . . . struck out with a stick and clipped the puck across the rink to the Cranton right defense. The figure was gone almost as soon as it had come . . . speeding over ice toward the Malden goal . . . taking a return pass from the right defense and sending the puck on a driving line straight to Morrow, Cranton left wing. Morrow, given his first decent shot at the Malden cage during the entire game, made good . . . sending the puck bouncing into the net for the score which tied the game—3 to 3!

All Cranton burst forth in a tremendous cheer . . .

"Yea, Morrow! Yea, yea, Reeder!"

The great Kent had lost some of his cockiness when the two teams lined up, breathlessly, for the last two minutes of the game.

"Give me the puck again!" chided Norman, face flushed. "I dare you!"

The Malden star muttered something unintelligible.

Whistle!

Norman found himself in a maze of slashing sticks. He jabbed about frenziedly as he caught occasional glimpses of the puck. The air was ringing with wild shouts and entreaties. Two minutes to play and the score tied. Ah, the puck—he had it! It was up to him to score. He could do it! Norman started for the Malden goal. Across the rink he could see Hallberg, skating free. Hallberg was Cranton's right wing. He was motioning to Norman and yelling. But there was no time to waste. Individual work counted now. Behind him Norman could hear clicking skates. A glance over his shoulder—the great Kent—bearing down in flashing strides . . . the Malden goal ahead . . . and Morrow dashing across in front . . . yelling out for the puck. A chance for the goal and a chance to defeat Malden single-handed! But there was Morrow . . . twenty feet away . . . imploring . . . and Hallberg following in . . .

"Shoot!" begged the crowd.

Norman shot . . . but not at the goal. He couldn't bring himself to do it . . . somehow. As the puck left his stick he was struck a glancing blow from behind and hurled off his feet in a tangled up heap. The figure of Eldred Kent shot past.

Sliding along the ice, Norman caught a dazed glimpse of Morrow stopping the puck . . . of his smacking it toward the goal . . . of the Malden goal tender blocking the try . . . and passing to . . . KENT!

Less than a minute of play . . .!

Sobbing for breath, Norman pulled himself from the ice . . . regaining his feet as the Malden star swept past, dodging, zig-zagging one side and the other, eluding all Cranton opponents on a determined drive for the Cranton goal . . . and victory.

"Oh, if I'd only shot!" cried Norman, as he struck out in pursuit. But this thought did not stay with him long. He became conscious only that he must overtake Kent; that he must keep the Malden ace from scoring; that if he didn't . . .? Defeat, certainly! A tie, if he did . . . an overtime game, perhaps.

Ten strokes behind at the start . . . nine . . .

eight . . . seven . . . ! His lungs began to burn with the exertion of it. There were stabs of pain as he gasped in air. Six . . . five . . . Kent had gotten around Packard . . . there was only Penrod now . . . poor Penrod . . . lurching forward . . . stick held across his body . . . desperately anxious . . . four . . . three . . . he must make it . . . and Kent, faking a pass to his left wing . . . Penrod turning sidewise . . . a yawning opening . . . two . . . Kent, eyes on the cage, babying the puck with the blade of his stick . . . ready to shoot!

Blade hit blade as Norman, falling to his knees, slid by Kent in a sprawling dive. The puck struck a goal post and bounded out, Norman sliding almost into it. There was such a roar now that it seemed ear-splitting. Norman was on his feet again . . . tottering . . . but on his feet. He must get the puck away from his own goal. It was still dangerously near . . . and, so was Kent!

Time-keepers bent over their watches. One of them raised a gun, his finger twitching against the trigger.

Down the rink, Morrow and Hallberg, Cranton forwards, skated in circles, hoping against hope.

The great Kent, following up, sought to regain the puck . . . to reach it first . . . and pop it into the cage. Bunt Penrod, getting back into play, blocked Kent's path . . . the Malden star having to swerve around the Cranton substitute. It was this fraction of a second's delay which gave Norman his chance. Stick met puck in a well-aimed drive. The puck shot down the ice, just out of reach of the Malden center, who made a great try for it. Morrow, closing in, caught the puck on his stick and passed it across to Hallberg. The pair slipped past the Malden defense, with members of both teams racing down the ice after them. Hallberg slipped the puck back to Morrow near the Malden goal . . . and Morrow—on a short, quick stroke—whizzed it into the cage.

Bang!

For a few moments after the final gun there was not a sound. Up near the Malden goal a Cranton player sat upon the ice, crying happily. Near the center of the rink a crestfallen Malden player stood, staring. Then he slowly skated toward the sidelines, shaking his head as though the outcome was still unbelievable. Cranton, 4; Malden, 3!

Nobody was forced to eat raw fish in Cran-

ton that night, nor was anyone made to take an icy bath. Things were more civilized now. But, after Malden had completely evacuated its rival town, leaving Cranton to the spoils of victory—a celebration and a silver cup—Norman Reeder confessed sheepishly to his delirious team-mates.

"If I hadn't been so all-fired sore at myself for doing what I had done, I'd never have done it!" he tried to explain.

Of course no one could understand what he meant . . . but what did it matter?

THEY SHALL NOT SCORE

"IT'S Flint 'U' or us!"

An excited group of students, both boys and girls, gathered about the bulletin board in the main corridor of Hollister College, exclaiming as they studied the latest standings in the Little Six Hockey League.

For the first time in years, Hollister College, smallest of the six competing schools, had a chance to win the championship! By virtue of a thrilling 3 to 1 victory over Carver the night before, Hollister had gone into a tie for first place with Flint "U", each team having won eight games and lost but one.

"Captain Nord's the boy who did it!" cried a student. "Where'd we been without him? Yea, Nord!"

A tall, slenderly built youth, standing on the outer edge of the gathering, flushed his embarrassment and backed hastily away. The cap-

tain of the Hollister College Hockey team was always fussed by praise. It was mostly because he felt so undeserving . . . but it was because he felt that way that everybody liked him. He was the idol of the school. Quiet, shy, lightning-flash Nord! That's how many folks described him. A whiz in action; a mild-mannered snail in repose. Off the ice he actually gave the impression of one who would shirk from physical combat of any kind. On the ice . . .? Rushing cyclones!

But, just as Hollister had been willing to bestow the major part of the credit for her team's splendid showing upon Nord, so had Flint "U" ample reason for giving recognition to Bruno Moulton, her captain. Moulton, large and powerful of frame, had developed the reputation of being the hardest puck hitter in the league. "He's the Babe Ruth of hockey," a state paper had said, in giving an account of Moulton's play, "An evidence of the terrific force Moulton puts behind the puck is the breaking of Goalie Edward's leg in the Scanlan game. Though heavily padded, the blocking of one of Moulton's vicious drives from mid-ice, caused the bone in Edwards' right leg to be snapped just below the knee. It is no secret that other goalies

pay Moulton the respect of letting his bullet-like drives burn past unchallenged. This, perhaps, is the reason why Moulton is leading point scorer of the league. In addition to his hard hitting ability, the Flint captain, because of his size and build, is noted as a hard player. He can ride through more furious mix-ups and come out on top than the majority of his opponents. There is no other center who can compare with him unless that be center Nord of Hollister and, unfortunately, Nord was unable to test his strength against Moulton in the first game scheduled between these two schools, due to illness. The style of play of the two is entirely different, Nord accomplishing by speed and clever stick handling what Moulton does by sheer physique and driving force."

Such was the estimate on Bruno Moulton, an estimate which Carl Nord, his only acknowledged rival, did not need to read in order to verify. He was too well acquainted with Moulton's ice prowess as it was. Too well acquainted even though he had never faced the Flint star in college competition! For Nord's acquaintanceship dated back before college days . . . to high and grade school and a fact which had not, as yet, been widely heralded.

He and the mighty Moulton had come from the same town!

There was more to it than that—much more. But Nord had taken great care not to communicate a word of it. On the contrary, he had tried desperately to forget his past connection with Bruno Moulton. The very name conjured up pictures which made Nord blush with humiliation and shame. What a coward he had been, always to have given in to the bullying of the hulking Moulton! But all the fellows in Riverdale had done the same thing. Big-fisted Moulton had scared them stiff. He had ruled by might rather than leadership. And later, nature having endowed him with a Goliath-like body, he had continued his dominance in sports, shining most prominently in football and hockey.

That Nord, despite his more slender build, had been rated second to Moulton in athletic accomplishment, gave back no satisfaction. It was gall and wormwood that he had always been forced to knuckle under . . . gall and wormwood because the *knuckling under* had come through fear of Moulton rather than lack of ability to match his. That was the rub! If he had only been able to have faced Bruno Moul-

ton just once unafraid— Remorsefully, Nord remembered time on time when he had succumbed rebelliously to Moulton's dictates. He could hear Moulton's boorish laugh ringing out now . . . the laugh of a tormentor who knew his strength and gloried in the exercise of it. A hero, a self-appointed hero, because none had the courage to say him no!

How joyfully Carl Nord, the mild-hearted, had welcomed freedom from such bondage! The freedom that going to college would bring! Devoid of Moulton's devastating influence and in the company of a new bunch of fellows, Nord was sure his real ability would crop out. He would be the king-pin for a change, and more deservedly so, since he was resolved that his ascendancy should not be gained through bullying. His spurs would be earned—earned in such a manner that team-mates would loyally uphold his rights to laurels attained.

And so, with these thoughts in mind, Nord had decided that he would attend Flint "U". It was the biggest college of the Little Six group and afforded the best athletic opportunities. But, imagine his consternation when he learned that this was the college which Bruno Moulton had selected! Carl could recall the feverish

night he spent wondering what he should do about it. And then, the doing of just what he had always done in the face of Moulton—*giving in!*. "Laying down," some folks would have called it. At any rate, Nord made an eleventh hour change in his plans and determined upon Hollister in place of Flint. He *must* have that freedom that he craved.

But now—now after having realized long-stunted hopes, Carl Nord, the idol of Hollister College, knew within his heart that he was about to meet up with the old issue. It was to be the old issue grown mightier and more fearsome than ever, for—in Riverdale—the fellows surrounding him had been able to appreciate his groveling attitude. There, he had been able to take refuge in a common cowardice. Here, a betrayal of those pent-up feelings in the presence of this individual would be branded for what they actually were! Oh, why—why did this demon in the form of Moulton always chase him, no matter how hard he tried to run away? Nord, hastening down the steps of the main building on his flight from the bulletin board, pressed fingers against his pounding temples, while in his mind these thoughts began a weird dance.

"Next Saturday Flint "U" plays Hollister for the championship! Next Saturday, Flint plays Hollister at Hollister. You play Moulton! You play Moulton! Next Saturday! One week from tonight! One week! You can't get out of it! You've got to play! You've got to play the hardest-hitting, hardest playing man in hockey! And he loves you! He loves you! And you love him! Oh, how you love him! You'll be lucky if you don't get a cracked head or busted shin. You know him from away back. He's a mean one . . . he'll just about murder . . ."

Cheerful thoughts, these! So cheerful that they seemed all but paralyzing to the captain of Hollister's hockey team. To think that, on top of his clash with Moulton, the championship had to depend upon the outcome of the game! It would be bad enough to make a miserable showing against the Flint "U" star, but to have that showing responsible for Hollister's losing . . . ! Nord groaned aloud. He could picture the whole dismal happening as vividly as though it had already taken place. He could see his fellow students turning from him in disgust. But, how could he help it? If they only knew Moulton as *he* knew him! Yet, why was it

—WHY was it that he didn't fear another soul except Moulton? Nord shook his head in despair.

"Well—hello, Carl!"

It was a girl's voice, an extremely familiar girl's voice, and Captain Nord jerked his head up quickly.

"Oh . . . a . . . hello, Ruth! Going my way?"

A pair of bright eyes smiled roguishly.

"Which way is that? You were poking along in no particular direction, it looked like to me."

"Was I? . . . I—I guess I was thinking pretty hard about something. I was supposed to be headed for the library."

"Fine! That just where I'm going. Oh, Carl—have you heard from home lately?"

"No . . . not since the first of the week. Why? Did you get some news from the old town?"

"I should say I did! Carl, they had an awful fire there. Burned out half the block just below my father's store . . . !"

"You don't say? Funny mother didn't write me about that. Maybe there's a letter home now. When'd it happen?"

"Night before last. I just got word today. Have been dying to see you ever since. They thought the whole town was going for awhile. Guess it would if it hadn't been for the great work of Fire Chief Moulton and his men . . .!"

Moulton! How many more times was that name going to confront him? If it wasn't Bruno it was his father. Blankly, the fellow who had come from the same town stared at the girl who was also a resident of Riverdale. Ruth Sawyer! She was the only other person in Hollister from Riverdale. Queer, too, that she and he had always been such good friends. Many times, during their terms at college, they had exchanged news . . . news that one knew the other would be interested in. Seemed as though, for this reason, they both had so much in common. Carl had taken her lots of places, too. She'd been such a good pal. But—and here the face of the hockey captain colored. Because Ruth had come from Riverdale she was also the only one who . . . who might have suspicions as to how he felt about Bruno Moulton! There had been times when . . . but that was some years ago . . . when he'd been just a kid . . . she probably hadn't remembered them . . .

"Oh, Carl!" exclaimed Ruth, "Isn't it wonderful to think that we're tied for the lead . . . and you're going to get into this game against Flint? If you'd been able to play that first game against Flint we might never have been defeated!"

Did he imagine it or was there the slyest of looks in her eyes? Was she really sounding him out? Had she, knowing more about his past than anyone else in Hollister, half-divined the reason he had not played in the first contest scheduled with Flint? And was she wondering now, even as he was wondering, what was to be his attitude since Hollister and Flint were to fight it out for the . . . or, rather—since he and Moulton were to . . .? Well, whatever she was doing, it was sure unusual to have her switch from the telling of local news to . . . to remarking about the one thing that was worrying him!

"Why, I—I guess I'm not quite as . . . as indispensable to the team as all that," the captain of the Hollister hockey team found himself stammering, "Flint's got a great six this year and . . ."

"But *you* practically beat Carver single-

handed last night!" protested the girl from Nord's home town, "And Carver was the only team to defeat Flint this season. If *your* playing could have counted so against Flint's conquerors, it stands to reason that you'd have been a big help the first game we had with Flint. Everybody says that Carver's a better team than Flint . . . no matter if Flint did get revenge. And we're rated best of all after what we did to Carver. Nobody thinks much of the one game we lost because we didn't have our full strength on the ice. Now with *you* . . .!"

Ruth was talking earnestly. She loved sports and ice hockey was her favorite game. This made her, consequently, one of Hollister's most enthusiastic rooters. The two had reached the sidewalk turning in to the stately entrance of the library. Carl paused, seizing Ruth urgently by the arm and drawing her to one side. He couldn't stand it any longer.

"Listen, Ruth!" he implored, "I want to tell you something . . . something I hope you won't repeat. But I've got to tell somebody. You're giving me lots of credit for . . . for the showing Hollister's made this year. Everybody is. But I—I don't deserve it . . .!"

"Why, Carl—I don't see how you can say that! You've . . .!" Ruth's eyes were widening.

"Please, don't try to save me! You could guess! You *are* guessing! Remember . . . some years back . . . the high school Junior Prom . . . I wanted to take you . . . but I—I didn't dare ask you because I . . . well, Moulton told me *not* to!"

It sounded foolish, making such confession, but what a relief it was to have shared the knowledge of this incident with someone! An incident which had caused him burning humiliation and self-censure. Perhaps, now that someone else knew about it, the incident would lose its power to torture.

"Moulton's always stood between me and . . . and things I've wanted to do," continued the fellow who had become the idol of Hollister, "But I—I thought I'd gotten away from him when I came here. I don't know what there is about him . . . but he's just got my number—that's all! I've been bullied by him so much that he . . . that he . . . Well, the first game we had scheduled with Flint, I made off as though I was sick rather than to go in against him!"

"Carl Nord!"

Ruth's blue eyes flashed and the tone of her voice was condemning. The captain of the Hollister Hockey Team bowed his head shamefacedly, giving a furtive glance to the side as a group of students passed, taking the little scene in.

"Aha, the Cap's having a set-to with his girl friend!" jollied one of the group, loudly enough so that the words carried to the couple's ears.

"I know it was a yellow thing to do," admitted Carl, "I can't even understand how I let myself do it. But I knew I'd go to pieces if I played . . . and I thought I'd be saving the team that much. Now . . . well, there's no getting out of it now! . . . I'll have to play . . . I'll have to go through it somehow . . . and then you'll see what a grand pretense I've been all year . . . and you'll despise me . . . even as I despise myself!"

The fellow who had felt his life ruled by a bully, shifted his feet uneasily and dared not look up into the eyes of the girl from his home town. What must she be thinking? What would her reaction be to such an extraordinary outpouring of his feelings? Would she resent his frank admission or would she sympathize

with the predicament he was in? Carl was not kept long in suspense.

"You surprise me," said Ruth, bitingly, "I had no idea you felt that way toward Bruno Moulton. I thought that any affairs you'd had with him back in Riverdale were childish things of the past. And as for his being a bully—I've always considered him a friend and gentleman."

"That may all be," agreed the hockey captain, feeling his cheeks flush, "But I . . ."

"And furthermore," added Ruth, in a pointed tone, "He's written asking to see me the night of the game . . .!"

"He has?" All fear of Moulton was momentarily forgotten as a new and disturbing thought flashed into Carl's mind. "Why, I—there's to be a big party after the game . . . I'd planned on asking . . . er . . . a . . . I was hoping we could sort of . . ."

"Now be careful!" warned the girl from his home town, giving a scornful little laugh, "Don't get in Moulton's way again!"

She turned quickly, ran up the library steps and disappeared within, leaving an extremely mortified and indignant youth staring after her.

Hollister was one of those small colleges fortunate enough to have been showered with endowments, one of them being a stadium for the playing of ice hockey. Milton Spencer, former star and graduate, had gone out into the world, skated into several millions and promptly skated back to his alma mater to deposit some of the cold cash into making athletic enjoyment for the present incumbents a thing of greater glory and facility. Thus the indoor ice hockey rink which seated five thousand rabid spectators at almost every contest and hung several hundred wilder rooters from the rafters.

Tonight, with a championship at stake, the capacity of the Spencer Hockey Stadium was expanded to six thousand, the crowd all but pushing out the windows and trampling down the doors. Excitement had never run so high in Hollister. Even Milton Spencer was in the mass of heaving humans, though no one could establish his exact whereabouts. But the chances are that the donor of the stadium, important as he was, didn't have a seat. This was one time where first come had been first served, with a vengeance. A throng of three thousand milled about outside, determined to remain near the

scene of the contest and hear the progress of the game relayed to them from more fortunate fans inside.

"Tell us all about it, Joe!" intreated a student rooter of a friend who was perched in an open window, high up in the stadium.

"The best I can!" Joe promised, "They're getting ready for the face-off now! Can you hear me against that cheering?"

"Yeah, shoot!"

"Regular line-ups! Cap Nord's just shaking hands with Cap Moulton. Boy, that Moulton's a big ox! He's four inches taller than Nord . . . and Nord isn't any midget. But it's the build that makes Moulton! You should see him. Chest, hips and legs! Say, I'd hate to have him bump me! Might as well get hit by a locomotive! . . . Ah, the referee's dropped the puck! The game's on!"

For the next few minutes those outside could hear nothing but the terrific din of the crowd and the occasional cracking report as the whizzig puck smacked against the sideboards.

"Say, she's hotter than hot!" Joe finally found breath to call down, "Flint's got *some* offensive! They've rushed the puck right up to our goal four times . . . smashed through

our defense just like it wasn't there . . . but goalie Forbes—he's stopped 'em! That Moulton's sure a bear . . . everybody he runs into goes down like a ten pin!"

The throng outside, under Joe's window, was subjected to more minutes of gnawing suspense. Then a great groan went up inside, intermingled with booing.

"Hey, Joe!"

"Don't forget us!"

"What's the matter?"

"What's happened?"

The fellow addresed leaned far out of the window.

"It's Nord!" he informed, "He's terrible! He's away off form! Moulton's taken the puck away from him time and again. Carl acts like he's afraid to mix it with Moulton . . . and Moulton's been joshing him. Just now he jammed Nord against the sideboards, got the puck and sailed a terrific shot that knocked goalie Forbes off his feet. It looked like a sure score but Forbes kicked the puck clear. Nord didn't get up till the play was over and he's skating about now as though his leg was injured. He's not getting much sympathy, though. The crowd's booing both Nord and Moulton . . .

Nord for the way he's acting . . . and Moulton for the rough stuff he's pulling. Gee, guys, you ought to see this! It's the game of a life time!"

The first period was within two minutes of the end when those who had not been able to get inside the stadium were aroused to a frenzy of excitement by a tremendous outburst, followed by cheers.

"Yea, Hollister! Yea! Yea! Yea!"

"We've scored!" yelled Joe, from his vantage point, "We've scored! Wow, what a lucky break! Cooney, our right wing, took the puck the length of the ice and fired a shot at the goal from the side. The puck struck the Flint goalie's knee pad and bounded a few feet away. The goalie started to skate out to get it but he slipped and fell, leaving the cage wide open. And just as this happened, Nord came swooping past, reached out his stick and scraped the puck into the net! Boy, the horseshoe is sure with us! By the defense that's being put up, that one point may look like a million! Worked out just right to save Nord's hide, too! Hear the cheer they're giving him? He doesn't act very tickled, though. He's shaking his head as if he knows that dame fortune helped us score that one! But

THE SECOND PERIOD BROUGHT A FURIOUS ASSAULT ON THE *Flying Heels.*

PART OF FLINT LED BY THE REDOUBTABLE BRUNO MOULTON.
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she's all in the game! There goes the bell . . . first period's up!"

During the ten minute intermission, Coach Hilyard instructed the Hollister six to play a tight defensive game, taking no big chances which might leave their goal unguarded. He commended the team for its fine play, reserving however, certain remarks for the team captain.

"What's the matter with you, Carl? Moulton's getting the puck from you almost every time you face-off. This forces us on the defensive. We haven't been able to get our formations going. You haven't gotten beyond mid-ice on so much as *one* dash with the puck. Moulton's stopped you dead. You've slowed up even, when you saw you were going to meet him. Step out of it! Get going!"

The chagrined Nord made no answer. He only sat, fingering his gloves, while team-mates eyed him curiously.

The second period brought a furious assault on the part of Flint "U", an assault which was led by the redoubtable Bruno Moulton, whose spectacular rushes down the ice brought rounds of cheers from Flint supporters.

"I tell you, goalie Forbes is a miracle man this game," cried Joe, with the period half over,

"They've peppered him with shots but he's blocked 'em all. Even Flint gives him a hand for his great work. Nord's worse than ever. I never saw him play so poorly. You know something—it looks to me like he's scared stiff of Moulton!"

"Nord? . . . Nothing to it!"

"You ought to see! Moulton just laughs at the opposition Nord's putting up. He says something to Nord every time he gets a chance, too. And Nord's taking it all serious . . . Oh! . . . There was a close call! Goalie Forbes is knocked out!"

"Knocked out?"

"How come?"

"Moulton! . . . Gee, what a terrific wallop that big boy gives the puck! It sailed on a line and caught Forbes on the side of the head. The puck would have cleared the cage but Forbes couldn't dodge in time. Coach Hilyard's run out on the ice. Nord's got Forbes' head pillowed on his knee. Yea! Forbes is trying to get up! Is he *game?* I'll say he's game! . . . Moulton is taking a look at his head and offering apologies but Forbes is pushing him away. He's pulling on his cap. He's going to stick in!"

"Yea, Forbes! Yea, Forbes! Yea! Yea! Yea!"

"Get that ovation? He sure deserves it! With him out of the game Flint would have a walk-away! Iron man Forbes!"

The second period came to an end with both teams breathless but scoreless. The one point lead which Hollister had gained near the close of the preceding period, now commenced to loom as the million that Joe had predicted. Try as they might, the mountainous Moulton and his swirling cohorts had been unable to pierce Hollister's last, heroic defense. Forbes had stood up under a perfect hail of shots, his grim determination serving as an inspiration to team-mates faltering under Flint's merciless driving.

"They shall not score!" shrieked a Hollister fan as the second period ended, and the Hollister rooters took up the cry, chanting it. "They shall not score! They shall not score! They shall not score!"

With the idol of Hollister college completely handcuffed by the domineering play of the rival Moulton, it became increasingly obvious that Hollister's big chance for victory lay in her

ability to keep the charging enemy from the goal, and thus preserve her slender margin of advantage. Dame fortune could not be counted on to extend a helping hand again and Moulton's mastery of the situation at mid-ice precluded much possibility of Hollister's making more than a feeble attempt at offense. Flint had but to beat down one staunch and, as yet, unyielding barrier—goalie Forbes!

"Well, here they go into the last period!" informed Joe, acting as a human radio for the unseeing fans, "I've got a sneaking feeling we can't hold out all through this too. Forbes has come out with his head bandaged. He acts tired. Boy, Moulton just set Nord down hard! Nord's getting up now. He's sore. He's making for Moulton. Why, he's taken a pass at him with his stick! And Moulton's swung back! The other players didn't see what happened but they're piling in to break it up. Say—this is hot! Hear the referee's whistle! . . . He's sending Nord and Moulton to the timer's box. Listen to Flint "U" raising a rumpus. They think that it was all Nord's fault and that Moulton should be left in. They're just about right, too . . . but what can the referee do? He's got to call the foul as he saw it. Can you

imagine Nord losing his head like that? Moulton's outplayed him so far that he's about desperate. Moulton's making a big hit with the crowd. He's laughing and slapping Nord on the back as they enter the timer's box for a major penalty. They'll be out of the game five minutes! Believe me, that's tough on Flint! Moulton's about their whole team. Jingo! You don't suppose that's why Nord did what he did, do you? Figured he couldn't stop Moulton any other way . . . so fouled him to get him out of the game? . . . Gee, I'd hate to believe that! . . . Hello, Moulton's seen some Hollister girl that he recognizes; She's sitting on the aisle right next to the timer's box. He's doffing his hat and shaking hands. Oh, boy—you should pipe this! It's Ruth Sawyer! What's Cap Nord going to say to that?"

There was nothing that Captain Nord *could* say. He had seen Ruth at almost the same moment that Captain Moulton had glimpsed her. And he had given a quick nod of recognition . . . but Ruth had spurned his glance . . . having eyes only for the Flint "U" star.

Dumbly the rapidly fading idol of Hollister college looked on as the mighty Moulton advanced to pay his respects.

He could hear Ruth's voice, with a little thrilled note in it, as she greeted the other fellow from her home town.

"Bruno Moulton! I'm *so* glad to see you! Oh, your playing—I don't think I'll be adjudged disloyal if I tell you—it's magnificent!"

Nord, conscious that all eyes were turned unsparingly in his direction, could only catch the last few words of Moulton's reply.

". . . after the game?"

He saw Ruth nod her head and smile, then became suddenly aware that Moulton was preparing to make a remark about him.

"Riverdale's pretty well represented tonight, isn't it?"

The words were spoken in a voice of such volume as was intended to carry, and were accompanied by a sarcastic gesture toward the Hollister captain.

Nord's jaws tightened; his fingers twitched; he glared savagely at Moulton. Ruth's face flushed but she gave answer . . . such answer as caused Nord to bite his lips in exasperation . . . and those within hearing to gasp.

"It's well represented on the Flint side," she said. Then, with a little impassioned outburst, she exclaimed: "Oh, I hope you win! You de-

serve to win! If there's anything I detest it's poor sportsmanship . . . I'd rather our team would lose than win that way!"

There were tears brimming in Ruth's eyes. Her little outburst was greeted by sympathetic applause. Hollister believed in fairness; Hollister did not approve of questionable tactics. Moulton might have been an unusually rough player but he had not been detected in any deliberate fouling except that brought on by the Hollister captain's attack.

"Boo!" shouted the Hollister section, as the news of the incident traveled throughout the stadium, "Boo, Nord! Boo!"

The Hollister captain turned appealingly to the timekeeper.

"How much more time are we out?" he asked.

"Fifty seconds!" snapped the timekeeper, not looking up.

The fellow who had come from the same town as Ruth Sawyer, gazed out at the flashing figures on the ice and saw but a blur. Everything was happening just as he had pictured it—only worse—much worse. In a few moments the thing he had tried so hard to keep anyone but those in Riverdale from suspecting, would be known by all in the stadium. And

Ruth, whom he had regarded as a true friend, one whom he could trust implicity, would be most responsible for the heartless revelation! His shame was greater for his having been much older. His earlier failings might have been lived down . . . they undoubtedly had been . . . except in his own mind. But this last wretched display of weakness . . . it would brand him for all time. He would be looked upon with unfeeling contempt. All the fine things he had done before would be forgotten. And he would be remembered only for *this*. But the irony of all ironies was that Moulton would be hailed as a hero! He had the crowd with him now. The hulking bully! The crowd did not know Moulton as he had known him! Moulton of the raging temper! Moulton, relentless in his ambition to crush all with whom he came in contact. The crowd hadn't seen this Moulton. All that the crowd had seen had been Carl Nord—at his worst!

And then, as the timekeeper waved his hand, permitting the two penalized players to get back into the game, there came over the Hollister captain a flashing realization! There was one way . . . a desperate way that the crowd might be made to see the other side of the other

fellow from Riverdale—the side that he had known . . . and feared. Nord felt his heart pound at the thought of it! Could he . . .? *Dared* he . . .?

Moulton, on the way out to the rink, brushed heavily against the Hollister captain.

"Look out from now on!" he warned, in an undertone, "I'm going to get you—and get you *right!*"

But, for the first time in all the threats that he had received from the mighty Moulton, Nord threw back his head and laughed!

"There goes Nord and Moulton back into the game!" Joe advised his agitated listeners, "Only seven more minutes to play. Neither team's able to do anything with their centers out. Maybe Moulton won't tear up the ice now! He's given Nord the laugh but I'll bet he's nursing a grudge inside. Crash! There goes Nord, skidding against the sideboards! Say—he took after Moulton then as though he meant it! Brought the crowd right up on its toes! Wow! He's slashing at the puck with his stick! He's got it away from Moulton! Hear 'em roar! He's gone mad, gang—MAD! Moulton's dazed with surprise! He's taking after Nord! Gee! —he swerved in front, they tangled, and both

took headers! Flint's right defense is streaking down the ice with the puck now . . . Great stop! Forbes blocked a sure goal that time! We've got the rubber now . . . no, Flint's got it! Say—I can't report this game any more . . . it's gotten too all-fired fast!"

With two minutes left to play and Hollister still hanging frenziedly to the one goal lead, Captain Moulton called his two defense men into the attack to aid the tired forwards. The inexplainable return to form of Captain Nord had proved demoralizing. Since getting back on the ice he had more than given the rival center his hands full. But now . . . Flint just would not be resisted! Flint wanted that championship . . . and Flint would crash through in the time left to tie the score . . . and then win the game in overtime play! A thunderous roar of hysterial cries raged as five of the six Flint players swarmed about the Hollister goal, each frantically striving to get sticks on the puck and drive it past goalie Forbes.

"They shall not score!" shrieked Hollister.

And a white-lipped fellow who played center on the Hollister team, repeated the words under his breath . . . repeated them fervently . . . fiercely!

"They shall not score!"

A horrified yell as goalie Forbes was seen to go down after throwing his body in front of a whizzing drive from Moulton's stick. The puck bounded a few feet away with a melee of players making for it . . . and the goal, unprotected . . . affording a wide open opportunity:

"We're gone now!" cried Joe, hoarsely, "Flint'll tie sure: They're mixing it up in front of the goal. Forbes is down on his knees and nobody's guarding the cage! Yea! Yes they are, too! It's *Nord!* He's come from nowhere just in time to poke his arm in front of a wicked smash! He's knocked the puck to one side with his stick: Tough luck! Flint's got the puck again and Nord's broken the blade of his stick. He's blocking the cage with his body . . . and spreading his arms to the sides, clawing like a tiger: Boy, my heart's a goner if this keeps up! Oh—wow! He knocked the puck out three times then . . . the last shot caught him in the pit of the stomach! He's got a hand on top of the cage . . . leaning back as though he's all in. There goes Moulton after the rebound. Say, maybe he isn't some bear! He's bumped our left defense to the ice

and is squaring away for a rush! Isn't time never going to be up? . . . There goes goalie Forbes, crawling back toward the net on his hands and knees. Is he game? . . . And there goes Moulton . . . it's his last chance . . . smash bang . . . RIGHT INTO THE CAGE! Say, this isn't hockey . . . that is *football!* About everybody's piled up in front of the net. There goes the whistle. Can't tell yet whether the puck's in or not!"

"Come on, Joe!"

"Don't stop now!"

"Talk about a foul! Makes what Nord did to Moulton look mild in comparison! That great big bull about jammed Nord through the cage. He's lying across goalie Forbes and up against Nord, pinning 'em both down . . . YEA! . . . The puck *isn't in!* It's barely on the outside, right between Forbes and Nord. Now Moulton's beefing to the referee . . . but a lot of good it's doing him . . . his own team-mates are pulling him away. He's trying to rush at Nord but Nord's getting up and paying no attention to him. The game's all over and WE WON! Boy, what a game! My throat's torn to shreds!"

Inside the stadium, amid the wildest of

scenes, the captain of the Flint "U" hockey team skated sullenly off the ice, listening to a chorus of boos meant for him this time. He looked neither to left nor right, making straight for the exit to the locker room.

But the captain of the Hollister Hockey team, head up, started off the ice, followed by a group of admirers.

"Hey, Nord!" called a voice, "There's a girl here wants to see you.

The idol of Hollister stopped, skates cutting up a little spray of ice.

A girl? Who? . . . ? . . . If it was Ruth, he didn't want to see her. She'd snubbed him publicly and rebuked him. But, it *was* Ruth, and . . . and she was crying!

"Oh, Carl . . . forgive me! It was the hardest thing I ever did in my life!"

The fellow from her home town stared a moment. Could it be possible? Why, certainly! He might have known that Ruth wouldn't have said what she had said without. . . . What he had needed hadn't been sympathy. That was the whole trouble. He'd been sympathizing too much with himself. And Ruth had . . .!

The Hollister captain smiled, understandingly.

"It was the hardest thing I ever did, too," he said, softly, "But everything's all right now, thanks to *you!*"

A crowd of curious students gathered about. The girl from his home town dabbed hastily at her eyes.

"I—I haven't accepted an invitation for the party yet," she informed, blushingly, as Nord —suddenly self-conscious—attempted to break away.

But, at these words, he halted, facing a row of good-natured grins.

"You haven't!" he answered, speaking directly to Ruth as the row of grins widened, "I'll meet you at the library in fifteen minutes!"

THE ICE CRASHER

"YOU guys mark what I tell you," charged Dave Carter, centre and captain of the Seldon High hockey team, "Nat Hinkle spills himself on purpose every time he gets in a tight jam!"

"Get off!" defended Stew Edwards, Nat's running mate at left wing, "There's no bird on the team with more nerve than Nat's got!"

Fellow team-mates looked from Stew to Dave uncertainly. They were just about to take the ice for the big game of the season against Ridgewood—a game upon which the championship depended—and Nat Hinkle, now under discussion, had left the dressing room momentarily in search of tape to wind the handle of his stick.

"Nerve!" took up Dave, "That's a lot of applesauce! He's been buncoing us all year—making us think he's a dare-devil—going down

the ice like a streak and then skidding off his feet when he sees he can't get past the defense! Looks very spectacular and everybody says, 'what a chance Nat's taking!' but that's just why he does it—so he *won't* be taking any chances . . . to keep from getting hurt! He knows he's apt to get banged up if he crashes the defense and lets them body-check him, so he crashes the ice instead. Watch him, if you don't believe me! Just see how many times he hits the ice when he really doesn't have to . . . and, brothers, you'll see him take plenty of flops today because this Ridgewood crowd's noted for their stiff defense!"

Mort Stoddard, giant right defense man, stood upon his skates and glanced warily in the direction that Nat had gone.

"Say, fellows, there may be something to Dave's chatter at that! Does seem as though Nat takes about twice the spills that any of the rest of us do. But I always thought that was on account of his being the fastest skater. When you stop to figure it, though, he seldom gets through with the puck. He almost always goes down and the puck goes wild unless he's able to pass it beforehand. And I can't remember his being bumped very much except that

bad smash he got in the Crawford game. . . ."

"Yeah, which split his head open," finished Stew, "That was a mean one. But what does he do? Gets right up and wants to keep on playing. We have to pull him off the ice and the doc takes five stitches! Looks like Nat's yellow, doesn't it?" The tone was bitingly sarcastic.

"He's never been the same since!" insisted Dave, "Think it over, you guys! I haven't anything against Nat but we've got to win this game today and we've got to have someone in there who's not going to lay down . . . who's going to go through that Ridgewood defense! I'm willing to give Nat a chance! If he shows up good the first period then I'm talking through my hat. If he doesn't, then I claim we ought to yank him. But I want you birds to agree on it, that's why I'm putting it up to you, so you can judge for yourselves!"

"Fair enough!" seconded Ping Bailey, left defense, "I'm for giving him every break. I'd hate to accuse anybody of not having nerve unless . . ."

"Pipe down!" called Herb Reynolds, stocky goal tender, "Nat's coming back!"

The rise of Seldon High's hockey team to a

chance at the state championship was an undreamed of achievement, the more so because the group of fellows comprising the team had not been coached, save by themselves. In this connection Dave Carter, captain and star, had been agreed upon as leader. And Dave's natural enthusiasm and knowledge of the game had worked wonders in a sport which was new to Seldon. Students, aroused by their team's early season showing, had helped in the construction of a rink on the football field, enclosing its playing boundary with the conventional sideboards. The location of the rink was such that the football bleachers served handily in the support of hockey followers whose numbers grew swiftly with each succeeding game. And today the stands in front of the Seldon High Field House were packed to overflowing with rooters about evenly divided in partisanship between Seldon and the visiting school six, Ridgewood.

"Nice cold day," observed a fan, blowing on his hands, "That ice is in wonderful shape for the game. Wish it was time to start, though. I'd like to have something to wave my arms about!"

"It's goodbye Seldon!" opined a Ridgewood rooter, "So the only waving you'll have to do will be shaking your fists at us!"

"That's a good idea!" grinned the fan, "Looks like I'm bound to get hot one way or the other!"

Nat Hinkle's return to the dressing room brought an unnatural silence as fellow teammates self-consciously resumed preparations for the game. Nat glanced about him, mildly surprised, as he propped his newly taped hockey stick against his locker and sat down to slip into his skating shoes.

"This Ridgewood gang's plenty tough," spoke Dave, after an awkward moment, "Their goalie's supposed to be the best in the state. Of course part of the reason is that he's had two mighty good defense men in front of him. Anyhow we're due to meet a slam bang outfit today that's only been scored on in four games . . . and it seems to me, if we can cut loose like a cyclone in the first period and push the puck past 'em, we'll have our best chance of taking 'em over. The way they've been beating teams is to go out and shoot a goal and then lay back on the defensive and let the opposition

wear itself out trying to tie it up. So what do you say to putting on a little offensive of our own at the opening whistle?"

"Great stuff!" echoed Mort.

"You bet!" affirmed Ping, "Beat Ridgewood at her own game!"

"Try to at any rate!" said Herb.

A rap sounded on the door.

"Five minutes!" called a voice.

"On the ice!" ordered Dave, "Pass the puck around. Get warmed up and when the game starts—go! Nat and Stew . . . We're counting on you guys to give us the lead!"

Nat gripped his hockey stick determinedly. "Just watch us!" he invited.

"Don't worry! We will!" answered Dave, directly, and the two exchanged glances.

The fellow under suspicion lagged purposely behind and caught his running mate by the arm as they were about to leave the dressing room.

"Say, Stew—tell me . . . I've noticed something lately. What's the matter? Dave down on me? Am I being razzed . . . or what?"

Stew's face colored.

"Why, I . . . er . . . he stammered.

"Spit it out!" urged Seldon's right wing, "I can take it! What's the trouble?"

"Aw, they're all wet!" Stew burst out, loyally, "Dave says it looks to him like you've been doing some ice crashing . . . you know —taking tumbles to get out of hitting the defense . . ."

Nat started, jaws tightening. "So that's it, eh?" he said, grimly.

Stew nodded. "I don't think the other guys believe it," he hastened to assure, "But Dave's told 'em to keep their eyes on you this period and all I hope is you get through for a goal and make Dave look like a peanut for even bringing the matter up! Believe me, I told him plenty!"

"Thanks," said Nat, "You're a real pal."

There was no time for further comment as the two were now on the ice and Dave was shouting at them to hurry it up while the Seldon stands were giving their team a great welcome. The Ridgewood six was already on the ice, a formidable looking bunch of veterans, obviously heavier in build than their challengers to a state crown which was at present in their possession.

"Yea, Seldon—LET'S GO!" roared the Seldon rooters as the referee lined the teams up at center ice for last minute instructions.

"Ride 'em, Ridgewood!" came an answering roar from the visitors' section across the ice.

A moment later and, to the accompanying shriek of the whistle, a puck dropped from the referee's hand between two clashing hockey sticks. The battle for the championship was on!

The wings of both teams charged in at center ice in a mad attempt to capture the puck as it ricocheted off the sticks of the contesting centres. For several dizzy minutes the puck dodged and spun about in a small area of flashing feet and flying sticks with the atmosphere an upheaval of sharp-throated sound. It was a case of one powerful offensive against another and both striving to get under way at once with a desperate blockade resulting. Shrill screams burst forth as Nat Hinkle was finally seen to emerge from the melee nursing the puck at the end of his stick and setting off toward the Ridgewood net. Stew Edwards, left wing, suddenly appeared on his flank, cracking his stick on the ice to attract attention. Nat swerved to the right to dodge a lunging Ridgewood de-

fense man, almost losing the puck in so doing. He scraped it up with a lurching swoop to the side and continued on his wild dash with Stew following in, getting set to play for a possible rebound on the shot for goal that Nat evidently intended making. But Nat still had to pass Ridgewood's second defense man who was pressing him toward the sideboards and spectators shrieked as it was seen that the two were about to collide. The collision, however, never came for—at the last moment—Nat's feet inexplainably flew out from under him and he went sliding along against the sideboards, the defense man bringing up short in a shower of ice flakes, wheeling to hook the free puck with his stick and start off toward the Seldon goal.

"Say, doesn't that Nat go down?" cried a Seldon rooter.

"The spills he takes!" said another, "Wonder he isn't killed! See how he tried to get through between their defense and the sideboards? He might have been knocked cold!"

Play continued at a furious pace, neither side seeming able to penetrate the defense of the other, most shots at goal coming from far out and being easily turned aside by the goalies.

Dave Carter, Seldon star, was doing yeoman work at mid-ice, body checking and stickhandling with great effectiveness.

"Get in there, Nat!" he called, "Don't go around 'em! Go *through* 'em!"

Near the end of the first period with Seldon once more rushing the puck toward the Ridgewood cage, Nat took a spectacular header as the pass came to him and a defense man covered viciously. The puck, of course, rolled out of his reach and Seldon fans groaned as the Ridgewood defense man jumped Nat's prostrate body, caught up the puck on his stick and raced down along the sideboards. The groan deepened into a wail as the Ridgewood player shot—a whizzing drive which clipped past goalie Herb Reynolds and bounced into the net.

Score: Ridgewood, 1; Seldon, 0.

Bang: First period over!

On the way to the dressing room for the ten minute intermission between periods, Dave consulted fellow team members with questioning glances. He was answered by grim nods and guarded looks in the direction of one Nat Hinkle who was first off the ice in the company of Stew Edwards.

"You're right, Dave," admitted Ping,

"Nat's an ice crasher! He's liable to cost us this game!"

"Not if I can help it!" Dave retorted, "You guys behind me?"

"You bet!" came a chorused response.

"All right, then I jump him right now!"

The offending team member was replacing a broken shoe lace as his captain and fellow players burst in upon him.

"See here, Nat," addressed Dave, "What's the idea of your hitting the ice when you see yourself running into the defense—afraid to smack 'em? We didn't have any license to be scored against. You ought to have held onto that puck. Stew was in position to take a pass from you, right near the Ridgewood net, at least half a dozen times and what did you do? Spilled yourself!"

The face of the accused right wing flushed. He took a step toward his captain, hands on hips, eyes flashing.

"Meaning—you figure I dropped on purpose?"

"Correct!" replied Dave, unflinching, "You've been doing it every game!"

"That's a lie!"

"Well—since the Crawford game anyway!"

"Rot!" flared Nat, "I leave it to any of you guys! Me—flop? The way I go down the ice? What you talking about?"

But Nat's appeal met only stony glances and his gaze finally fell upon his running mate, Stew Edwards.

"How about it, Stew?" he pleaded, "You tell 'em!"

"I've already told 'em," was Stew's short reply.

"Nat," said Dave, bluntly, "I hate to do it but you're out of the game! Kinky Doyle's taking your place."

A look of astonishment and humiliation crossed Nat's face.

"But wait a minute, Dave!" he begged, "You can't do this! I . . .!"

"We're out to win, Nat! No use arguing!"

Dejectedly the fellow who had been branded as a coward watched his team-mates file from the dressing room to start the second period. When the last of them had gone out, he followed listessly and slumped down on the bench, pulling a robe about him.

"Hello!" he heard a spectator exclaim, "Nat's out this period! He must have been

hurt. That's tough! He was playing a bang-up game!"

Seldon's right wing hung his head and moaned.

Fighting desperately in an effort to penetrate a stiffening Ridgewood defense, the challenging six carried dash after dash into enemy territory only to be repulsed and sent back reeling and battered. The body-checking of Ridgewood's two defense men was fiercely executed, Dave and Stew being particularly singled out as attackers to be watched and bumped into submission. Five times during this strenuous second period penalties were called on one or the other of Ridgewood's hardy defense men, leaving their team short-handed for two minute durations but, each time, the remaining five or four team-mates banded themselves into an impregnable human wall, withstanding the most furious of charges. And it was not until the last three minutes of play that a shot of Dave's rebounding from the shin guards of the Ridgewood goalie gave Stew the first wide open opportunity to drive the puck home. As he caught the puck with his stick in front of the cage and spun it into a corner of the net, the Seldon

stands went wild with joy. It was a hard-won and richly deserved point and, two minutes later, when time was called, the Seldon team skated off the ice amid an ovation.

Score: Ridgewood, 1; Seldon, 1.

"Anybody's game now!" cried an excited rooter, "And what a game!"

"Too bad Nat has to be out of it," lamented another, "He was the fastest man on the ice. This Kinky's trying hard enough but he'll never be the player Nat is. He's hardly done a thing on the offense. But Stew—that guy's been a whiz!"

In the dressing room a vastly encouraged squad gave attention to its minor injuries and stretched out for a few minutes' respite on rubbing tables. It was then that a hollow-eyed youth approached his running mate, Stew Edwards, thus far the hero of the game.

"Great work, Stew!" he said.

"Pretty lucky!" was the disparaging answer, "Dave's shot pulled him from the net and I just happened to be in line to put it past him."

"Listen, Stew!" Nat's voice was low and vibrant with feeling. "Dave's right about my crashing the ice . . ."

"What's that?" Stew raised up from the rubbing table on an elbow.

"I guess you knew it without my telling you," went on Nat, shamefacedly, "I've been playing it safe ever since the Crawford game . . ."

Stew whistled softly and looked at Nat, shaking his head.

"And here I've been sticking up for you," he said.

"That's why I wanted to tell you," continued Seldon's right wing, "But I've really been trying to beat this thing, Stew! I've been thinking things over this last period . . . figuring myself out . . . and I know, if the guys would just give me another chance . . ."

The look in Stew's face was anything but reassuring.

"*How* do you know? he asked, pointedly.

"Well, I—I just *feel* different! That's the only way I can explain it. Remember how we used to go down the ice together? Like that! I wouldn't crash at the end, Stew . . . I'd go through and slip you the puck! As long as I thought the fellows didn't know about it I . . . well . . . it was easier to kid myself along . . . but now—why, Stew, I'm so

darned ashamed of myself I could hit both those defense babies going full speed!"

"Well, why talk to me about it? I'm not the captain."

Nat glanced about. Fellow team-mates were paying little heed to him. Captain Dave Carter was engaged in bandaging a wrenched knee.

"There wouldn't be any use of my talking to Dave—you know that," Seldon's right wing answered, helplessly, "I was just hoping . . ."

"Time!" shouted a voice.

"Come on, gang! The old fight!" cried Dave, "We're going to take this Ridgewood bunch!"

"Sorry!" said Stew, slipping from the running table, "It's not natural without you in there, Nat, but I don't see what I can do!"

And two minutes later the third and last period was raging. This time each team was shooting its bolt in a mad effort to put through another goal then assume the defensive for the remainder of the game but the much desired goal was not forthcoming and, after a period that was described by newspaper scribes as "blistering," the contest ended in a 1-1 tie.

"She's an overtime game!" yelled a Ridgewood fan, "Oh, boy! My fluttering heart!"

"Sudden death!" shouted another, "Play ten minutes or until the first team scores!"

In the several minutes pause before the resumption of hostilities, a weary Seldon sextet skated to the bench beyond the sideboards at mid-ice and went thirstily after the water bottles. But none of them did more than to wash their mouths out and to look at one another, sparing words for breath in consideration of the effort they knew was yet to come.

"Dave!" called a voice and a hand reached out over the sideboards to clutch the Seldon captain's arm.

"Nothing stirring!" was the rejoinder when Dave saw whom it was, and the grip was released, despondently.

Spectators went rip-roaring crazy as the "sudden death" period opened with the puck describing the most bewildering of paces up, down and across the rink, first in the possession of one side, then the other, with both goalies making lightning saves and defense men throwing themselves in front of attacking formations, body-bruising bumps resulting. And it was, as the aftermath of one of these, that Stew Edwards went down with a sickening thud that

could be heard above the din of the crowd. Play stopped and a doctor skidded out on the ice to examine the stunned player who lay where he had fallen. It was a minute or so before the Seldon left wing was seen to be coming around and, as he was lifted to his feet, arms about the shoulders of fellow team-mates, it was evident that he was through for the day.

"There's a blow!" groaned a Seldon rooter, "Bad enough to have Nat out with injuries . . . and now, Stew! That leaves us with two substitute wings. Our chances are gone! Best we can hope for is a tie!"

"Mac!" shouted Dave, motioning to a second sub. The fortunate player leaped over the sideboards as Nat, wildly imploring, sank back on the bench, burying his head in his arms.

"Wait a minute!" called Stew, his head clearing, "Who's that Dave's sending in?"

"Mac," replied Ping, an arm about the retiring left wing.

Stew stopped. "He shouldn't do that," he objected, "Hey, Dave! Come here!"

The Seldon captain skated up.

"How are you, Stew? Coming around? Hard luck, old man: You played a great game!"

"Razzberries! Listen, Dave—you put Nat

back in, you hear? Nat'll make good this time! You see!"

"Don't pay any attention to him—he's knocked goofy!" warned Mort.

"Is that so?" flashed Stew, "I'll knock *you* goofy! I know what I'm talking about. You need a guy in there who can take the puck down the ice on his lonesome while the rest of you lay back to pickle Ridgewood if his shot misses. Nat told me you had him right—he was crashing the ice—but he's dying for another chance and you're crazy if you don't give it to him! He knows more hockey than Kinky and Mac put together and you'll admit yourselves there's none of us can burn up the ice like Nat when he's going right!"

"Yeah, but he hasn't been going right most of the season!" objected Dave, "He . . .!"

"Give him a chance!" insisted Stew, "Give him a chance or I don't leave the ice!"

Exhibiting the qualities of a balky mule, Seldon's game left wing, resisted the efforts of fellow players to push and carry him from the rink. The word spread around that he was completely out of his head but the Seldon substitute interpreted Stew's resistence differently, imagining that the veteran was objecting to his re-

moval from the game. Mac consequently halted uncertainly near the sideboards awaiting a decision.

"Nat!" someone shouted.

The shout came from the group around Stew so that spectators could not tell the exact origin of it. But, with the calling of his name, Nat Hinkle bounded over the sideboards onto the ice and skated out to the knot of players. His appearance was greeted with mad cheers from the Seldon rooting section and substitute Mac Snyder, keenly disappointed, crawled back over the sideboards onto the bench.

"See here, Stew! You can't get away with this!" fired Dave.

"Play hockey and stop this wrangling!" demanded the referee, "Get this man off the ice at once or the game's forfeited!"

"Hinkle replacing Edwards," announced Nat, appearing before the referee, wide-eyed and eager, "Thanks, fellows, for this chance! I'll make it up to you! You see!"

"For Pete's sake!" exploded Dave, but there was no time for further parleying. Nat was out on the ice and further delay meant . . .!

There were three minutes remaining of the

first over-time period and the tenseness of crowd and players raised once more to a high pitch as the puck was again put in play. On the sidelines a fellow who had covered himself with glory waved aside the doctor and insisted on being permitted to watch the play.

"Nat'll make good, I tell you!" he kept saying, "Give the puck to Nat!"

But Seldon team-mates were not disposed to do this. Nervously on edge, each was too conscious of Nat's first period performance to trust their fellow player with the puck if they could help his getting it. They would finish out the game letting Nat serve only on defense. And the crowd was now treated to the curious spectacle of a player whom it regarded as a star, skating around in circles, cracking his stick on the ice, begging for team-mates to pass the puck to him, but not receiving it.

"What's coming off out there?" a Seldonite wanted to know, "Nat was through and free for a shot but Dave wouldn't slip it to him. Look at that: Another chance! Good night! That's awful!"

Nat's running mate leaped to his feet and leaned over the sideboards, making a megaphone of his hands.

"Get in there, Nat! They're trying to keep the puck away from you! Get her, big boy and show those babies something! . . . Then, to a wondering spectator behind him. "Can you imagine that—they're more scared of their own man than they are the Ridgewood team!"

Frenzied at being cut out of the play, the fellow who had confessed to cowardice under fire, took after his captain who had re-captured the puck following a Ridgewood drive. Veering in from the side, Nat bumped him severely and raked out with his stick for the puck. Dave went heavily to the ice and skidded against the sideboards as the crowd roared in perplexed surprise.

"Seldon's blowing higher than a kite!" cried a Ridgewood fan, "Look at that guy, taking the puck away from his own man!"

Whirling, the puck at last in his possession, Nat set out for the Ridgewood goal with Dave, scrambling to his feet and dashing in hot pursuit. In front the Ridgewood defense men, standing side by side, crouched to meet him. They refused to be sucked from their positions by his zig-zag course and were waiting until he was near enough so that they could dash at him and force him into a pocket . . . or else

crowd him to the sideboards and jam the puck away from him there.

"Go it, Nat!" screamed Stew, as Seldon's right wing passed mid-ice, gaining speed with every gliding stride.

Kinky Doyle followed down along the opposite side of the rink hopeful of getting into the play. Up the ice, Ping and Mort, Seldon defense men, could only watch, with bated breath, the individual sally of a team-mate suddenly gone mad. This certainly wasn't the Nat Hinkle of the first period . . . or—WAS it? The next few moments would tell. He was rapidly nearing the Ridgewood defense now with stocky blue-jerseyed forms bracing to meet him. Here was the place for an ice crasher! A sensational dash brought to naught after carrying the puck almost the length of the ice. Such performances as this had become an old story. Nat had said he'd make it up to them. But—*would* he?" If he went down now after the way he'd been forced back into the game . . .!

Ridgewood's left defense came out to meet the flying attacker with the rink a volley of frenzied sound. Behind Nat, and to the side, his enfuriated captain was fairly eating up

the space between them. Seeing the blue jersey looming up ahead, Nat brought a gasp from the crowd as he increased his speed, then bent low and coasted to take the impact, tapping the puck to the side at the last instant. The Ridgewood defense man, attempting a body-check, was tossed over the oncoming player's head and went sprawling to ice where he lay, face down.

"Go it, you wild man!" yelled Stew from the bench, "They will call you yellow, will they?"

But Seldon's right wing was wavering and dazed on his feet, swerving and looking crazily about for the puck.

"Let *me* have it!" shouted a voice, Captain Dave Carter dashed in from the side, reaching out his stick.

The shout only served to help Nat locate the puck. He hooked it with the crook of his stick, muttering angrily to himself.

"*You* have it? You guys don't want me to have it! Think I can't go through!"

Ridgewood's right defense was bearing down upon him now as he veered over toward the sideboards in an effort to get around. His shoulder and neck was numb from the first collision . . . if he could just get past this fellow and then in at the cage . . . right on

top of the goalie . . . without another smash! The Ridgewood defense man was between him and Dave. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Dave's red and white jersey . . . Boy, was Dave mad?

At close quarters Nat saw that he could not avoid another jolting bump. The defense man had him caught between the sideboards and himself. But there was a great opportunity for his escaping the blow . . . if he just left his feet and slid along against the sideboards the defense man wouldn't touch him. Of course this would put him out of the play . . . NO! He must stay in the play . . . stay to the very finish! He had promised the fellows . . . Nat bent at the knees and shoved the puck ahead of him. . . .

What happened the very next instant a heart-torn Nat was never able to exactly determine but, for some unaccountable reason—NOT of his own volition—his feet either caught or were tripped upon something, for he was precipitated head first and went sliding along the ice at great speed as the defense man, lunging at him, went crashing into the sideboards! He was through, but oh—so unhappily through!

A wildly hopeful team-mate on the sidelines

bit the knuckles of one hand and choked in a fever of disappointment. Fellow players on the ice gave vent to exclamations of bitterness.

"They'll think I did it on purpose:" was the flashing thought which occurred to the agonized youth as he lost his footing. And, as Nat struck the ice he was struggling to right himself, to keep on going. Ahead of him, in a blur of ice and apparently moving sideboards, he caught sight of a black dot—the puck! A stick was cracking on the ice—Dave's way of signalling for a pass. He was sliding swiftly into the corner of the rink! He could stop his slide and keep from crashing into the sideboards . . . but, if he did, he couldn't reach the puck ahead. Now, as he slid along on his stomach, hand and stick outstretched, there was a chance of scraping the puck in Dave's direction. Dave must be somewhere out in front of the Ridgewood cage from the sound. If he could only pass out to him maybe it would partly atone . . .!

In a fractional second of time, Nat found himself almost instantly within sweeping reach of the puck. Beyond, however, was the hard wooden wall of sideboards and, in another moment, his slide would carry him into them.

Nat slashed sidewise at the black dot on the ice. As he did so a blue-jerseyed form leaped over him and a stick swung where the puck had been . . . but the black dot had disappeared. The Ridgewood man had arrived too late. And Nat, without sufficient time to protect himself, crashed head-on into the sideboards at the end of the rink.

The fellow who had been branded a coward wasn't conscious of what took place after that. He was blind to the fact that his frantic last second clip at the puck had driven it straight across the mouth of the Ridgewood goal; blind to the marvelous stop that Dave made of it; blind to the whistling drive that followed which scorched the black rubber disc off the knee pad of the goalie into the net; and deaf to the storm which broke immediately thereafter when the scorekeeper added the winning goal to Seldon's total. . . .

SELDON 2
RIDGEWOOD 1

But he who was temporarily blind opened his eyes to see expressions of joy on his teammates' faces and to hear words of praise on

their lips and to live over, through them, the last feverish moment he had missed. It mattered not that new stitches had been taken in his head—he knew now, with a happy throb, that he had not only won the game by his miraculous assist but had won his place back in the hearts of his fellows. And he smiled when he heard a joy-crazed Stew repeating, "I told you guys there's no guy on the team with the nerve Nat's got:" To which Captain Dave gave warm reply: "And there's sure no applesauce to that!"

THE END

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